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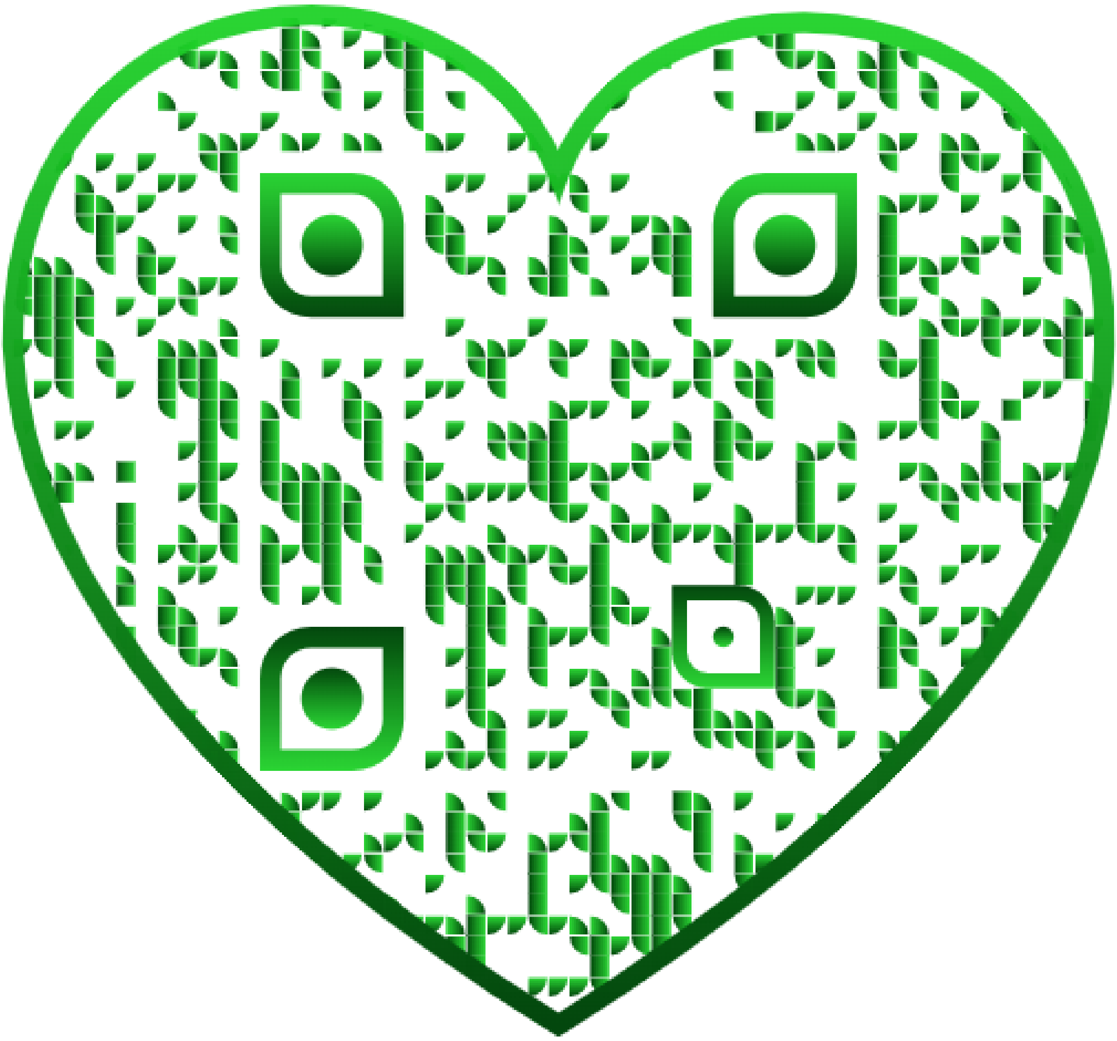

AUTOCAR PROMOTION

THE ALL-ELECTRIC MINI COUNTRYMAN

BIG ON SPACE MINI AT HEART

Sometimes, bigger is simply better. Take the all-electric MINI Countryman. This latest version of MINI's family SUV is a fair bit larger than its predecessor. And that's a good thing, because it's now more spacious and practical than ever before. There's room for the whole gang – including the four-legged family members. Yet, there are some things that thankfully haven't changed. It still looks and drives like a proper MINI. A car that turns heads from the outside and creates smiles on the inside. Add to that some clever, thoughtfully used technology and a brilliantly capable electric powertrain, and we think MINI has produced its most multi-talented car yet. Here's why…

BRILLIANTLY SPACIOUS

A great SUV should be accommodating. With its generous 460-litre boot – 1450 litres with the 40:20:40 rear seats folded – the all-electric Countryman has no trouble in that regard. And, with more head, leg and elbow room than the previous model, there's no shortage of space for passengers either. That plush interior is a remarkably pleasant place to be too, thanks to the eye-catching sustainable two-tone knit detailing, soft-touch vegan-friendly leather upholstery and fancy ambient lighting.

CUTTING-EDGE TECH

Technology is at its best when it makes life easier, like MINI's Intelligent Personal Assistant. It's fantastic at interpreting your voice commands and can do anything from activating the air con to taking you to the nearest charger. All of which is displayed on MINI's 9.4in circular OLED display. Plus, MINI's Driving Assistant adds plenty of helpful safety features. It'll monitor your blindspot, and even look out for cars when you're backing out of a space. It can also park itself thanks to the handy Parking Assistant.

POWER AND POISE

It may be the biggest member of the MINI family, but the hilariously nimble all-electric Countryman is still cracking to drive. With a punchy 204hp and 250Nm of torque from the Countryman E, acceleration is instant. Even more so in the all-wheel drive MINI Countryman SE ALL4, which ups that to 313hp and 494Nm of torque for a rapid 0-62mph time of just 5.6 seconds. The 64.7kWh battery offers up to 287 miles of range, and charging from 10 to 80 per cent takes less than 30 minutes. Perfect for a quick break.

MINI

WHY NOT BOOK A TEST DRIVE TODAY?

Test drives subject to status and availability

COMMENT

NISSAN'S FIGHTBACK HAS MADE A PROMISING START

Only a couple of months ago, we interviewed new Nissan CEO Ivan Espinosa about how the company, once so successful, will come back from the brink. Since then, job cuts and cost savings have been even more savage than predicted. Yet on this week's pages, we see the first steps in what will hopefully be a great comeback: the new Nissan Leaf and Micra.

The Leaf is notable for many reasons: it's the first mainstream EV to reach a third generation, having been an early pioneer; it's an all-new car rather than a gentle overhaul of a predecessor; and it's made in Sunderland. Early signs suggest it can compete comfortably with rivals in a busy sector (p30).

Then there's the Micra. You've been living under an automotive rock if you've not noticed the fanfare around the Renault 5. This new Micra is, in the crudest terms, a badge-engineered version of that model, built in the same factory in France. But, as editor Mark Tisshaw finds out (p32), Nissan has done a good job of differentiating its looks while maintaining the many positives of the 5.

Yes, Nissan can't claim all the credit for the Micra, but it's a savvy business move that gives the company a viable small car to sell once again. That, alongside promising first signs of the Leaf, gives us reason to be hopeful for Nissan's resurgence.

Rachel Burgess, magazine editor
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

Meanwhile, online...

autocar.co.uk

Octa takes on Ariel and Ford
Which of these rapid rough-roaders will get you from one side of the farm to the other quickest? Matt Prior has fun finding out.

The cars that did it first
We look at groundbreakers that changed the world one new technology at a time. From the first V8 car to this Saab's trick structure.

New Apple CarPlay tested
Tech firms are just better at tech than car makers – as Apple's latest proves, and then some. Join Jonathan Bryce in an Aston DBX for more.

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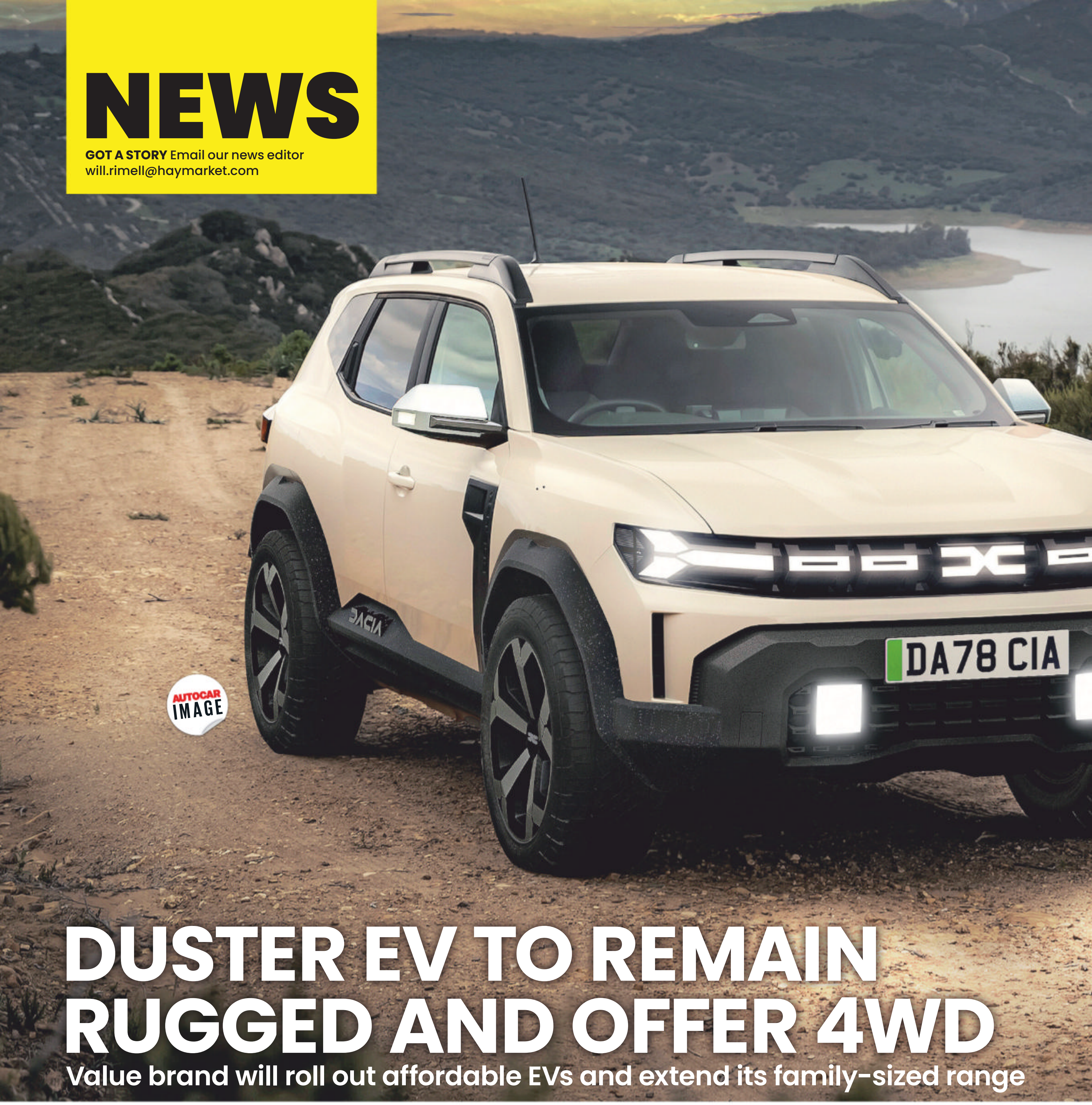


DUSTER EV TO REMAIN RUGGED AND OFFER 4WD

Value brand will roll out affordable EVs and extend its family-sized range

Dacia is readying its hugely popular Duster for the EV age – and the upcoming electric variant is set to stay true to its affordable, rugged ethos as well as retain the option of a go-anywhere 4x4.

The Romanian brand will showcase the next chapter of its reinvention in November, following the launch of its new Bigster flagship SUV earlier this year. CEO Denis Le Vot has already promised that there will be “a lot about electrification” as part of this showcase, suggesting that the firm will give the first details of how it will transition from ICE to EV power across its line-up.

Because of its focus on affordable models, Dacia currently only has one European EV, the Spring supermini, and it is sticking with ICE power for its core models: the Sandero,

Electric Renault 4 Savane concept's 4x4 set-up will be used for the Duster EV

Four-wheel-drive petrol Duster is set to be joined by an electric equivalent

Jogger, Duster and Bigster.

But as the 2035 phase-out date for ICE cars in the UK and the European Union approaches, Dacia is turning its attention to putting an electric line-up in place. As a result, EV versions of each of its cars are in the pipeline – and Le Vot has already told Autocar that an electric Duster "will come in time".

Dacia has not disclosed a timeframe or specific details for an EV version of its big-selling crossover – a car that has sold 65,000 examples across Europe so far this year.

In keeping with Dacia's policy of using architectures and technology from its Renault sibling brand, the electric Duster will be based on the EV-specific CMF-BEV platform that underpins the Renault 5, 4 and upcoming Twingo.

Effectively an EV-adapted version of the current, petrol-powered Duster's CMF-B platform, this structure can be used for city cars right through to mid-sized SUVs and will be the basis for all of Dacia's upcoming electric cars.

Crucially, it has now been confirmed that CMF-BEV can house a second motor on the rear axle, which means the Duster EV can remain faithful to its rugged, outdoorsy billing with the addition of a 4x4 variant.

All existing production cars that use CMF-BEV are front-driven and there had been questions over whether the platform's packaging could facilitate a second motor. However, Renault recently revealed a 4x4 concept version of the 4 – understood to preview an imminent production version – which adds a driven rear axle to enhance the crossover's off-roading abilities.

That has significant implications for the Duster, which is very close in size to the 4. The Duster is one of the most affordable 4x4s currently on sale and will no doubt be pitched similarly in the electric era, when it will compete against the likes of Fiat's upcoming Grande Panda 4x4 and Toyota's 'baby' Land Cruiser.

In the shorter term, Dacia will add a new range-topping hybrid 4x4 version of the third-generation Duster (which was launched towards the end of 2024) later this year. An electrified back axle will give it all-wheel drive to challenge the Jeep Avenger 4xe.

The Duster is set to be the second of Dacia's current model line-up to gain an EV, after the Sandero hatchback, which is due a battery-electric option as it moves into its next generation in 2027.

Dacia's first EV was the Spring; a Twingo-based successor is due in 2026

"The platform can house a second motor on the rear axle so the Duster EV can be a rugged 4x4 variant"

But before that, Dacia will launch a pair of new C-segment models to sit alongside the Bigster at the top of the line-up as part of the firm's push to claim a share of Europe's busiest and fastest-growing market segment. Dacia has not confirmed any details of these two new cars, but they are expected to be ICE-powered initially, given that they're due in dealerships by 2027.

A £15,000 electric city car to replace the Spring is also due to be launched next year and, unlike its predecessor, it will be built in Europe for the local market – most likely alongside the upcoming Renault Twingo on which it will be based.

As with the Sandero, the Duster is expected to continue in its current ICE-powered guise past the end of the decade, with the EV being added as a powertrain option, rather than a replacement. Parent company Renault does the same with the ICE-powered Clio and similarly sized electric 5, which use CMF-B and CMF-BEV respectively.

Dacia has not said whether it plans to build electric and ICE-powered cars at the same factory. However, it touts the commonality between its current core models as instrumental in keeping prices down, because it is able to build all of them on the same line and thus save significantly in production costs. It is likely to pursue the same approach in the electric era.
FELIX PAGE

PEUGEOT GTIs ARE BACK – STARTING WITH THE E-208

Hot electric supermini will have "typical GTi agility and steering feeling"

Peugeot's revered GTi badge has returned to appear on its first electric performance car, a hot hatch based on the e-208 that is aimed squarely at compatriot Alpine's A290.

Its launch at last week's 24 Hours of Le Mans marks the return of one of the most evocative badges in performance motoring, after the 308 GTi went off sale in 2021. It is also the first hot Peugeot since the 508 PSE was axed in late 2024.

Developed by Peugeot Sport and inspired by the widely admired 205 GTi, the new car represents a dramatic overhaul of the city-focused e-208.

The key to the package is a motor transplant from the Alfa Romeo Junior Veloce. Mounted up front and paired with a mechanical limited-slip differential, it puts out 278bhp and 254lb ft – a substantial increase from the regular e-208's 154bhp.

These reserves slingshot the 1596kg hatchback to 62mph in 5.7sec – 0.2sec quicker than the 255bhp Mini John Cooper Works Electric and 0.7sec ahead of the 217bhp Alpine A290 GT Performance. Its top speed is claimed to be 112mph.

Alongside that extra pace, it is fitted with hydraulic bump stops and a rear anti-roll bar. The steering is also said to have been tuned for more direct responses.

The new GTi gains a look that matches its performance billing. The hot hatch is 30mm lower than the standard car and the tracks have been widened by 56mm at the front and 27mm at the rear to create a muscular stance.

What's more, it gets bold 18in alloys fitted with track-focused Michelin Pilot Sport Cup 2 tyres. Sited behind them up front are a set of 355mm brake discs.

The fitment of such large wheels with the GTi's low-set stance has required wheel-arch extensions, marked out with bright red stripes that match the body's paintwork.

Modifications have also been made to the e-208 GTi's battery performance. While the 54kWh nickel-manganese-cobalt pack is the same as the standard car's, Peugeot said it has adapted the software using developments from its hybrid-powered 9X8 endurance racer to reduce temperatures under high loads and improve energy recovery.

The pack yields a range of 217 miles and can be replenished from 20-80% in less than 30 minutes via a 100kW charger.

"The new Peugeot e-208 GTi embodies our commitment to performance and innovation, drawing from our extensive race pedigree," said Jean-Marc Finot, senior vice-president of Stellantis's motorsport operations.

Finot, previously an engineer involved in the development of the original 205 GTi as well as the later 206 GTi 180, added that the new car will possess "the typical Peugeot GTi agility and steering feeling".

While the GTi badge returns first on an electric model, new hot combustion Peugeots have not been ruled out – but Peugeot CEO Alain Favey previously told Autocar that any decision would depend on customer feedback.

"We will start with the e-208 and [are] definitely listening to your inputs, or what our customers will say as well," he said. "We don't exclude that there might be other executions of the 208 GTi under the GTi badge, but for today there's absolutely nothing planned in that sense."

CHARLIE MARTIN

Changes compared with the standard e-208 include a front lip, a new rear spoiler and a chunky rear diffuser, which has a motorsport-inspired integrated rear foglight.

"Mounted up front, its motor puts out 278bhp for 0-62mph in 5.7sec"

DISCO SPORT TRIMS BOOSTED

Land Rover has updated the Discovery Sport, following changes to the Discovery and Defender. It gains an upgraded entry-level trim and a luxurious range-topper. Prices span £45,440 to £59,545.

SPECIAL POLO MARKS 50TH

A new special-edition Volkswagen Polo marks 50 years since the hatch's launch. Pitched between R-Line and Black Edition trims, the £26,350 model gains '50' badges and bespoke Crystal blue metallic paint.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

References to the 205 continue inside the e-208 GTi: the bucket seats are split between red and black panels and the floor mats are trimmed in red.

New alloys are inspired by those fitted to the later 1.9-litre 205 GTi and use the original GTi typeface.

IT'S A WELCOME RETURN, IF IT DELIVERS

MATT PRIOR

Well thank heavens for that. Peugeot dropping the GTi name always seemed like a decision someone would come and undo one day, and here we are. Quicker than I expected.

Let's just hope that the car is up to the badge. Maybe recent sporty models are why Peugeot – once the king of hot hatchery – decided it shouldn't use the badge for a while. The firm didn't feel they were fit for it.

But now Alpine has shown, with the A290, that it is possible to make a fun front-drive EV that doesn't cost a shed load of money.

Things aren't as straightforward as they used to be, of course. Both the A290 and a standard e-208 weigh the wrong side of 1500kg. But bodyshells are stiffer than they were when Peugeot and Renault Sport (which is sort of what Alpine represents) used to go head to head in a petrol hot hatch shootout. Tyres are better, brakes bigger, cars generally more capable, if that's a good thing (and I accept it may not be).

Ultimately, though, the GTi is a car setting out to be fun and I'm all for that. Peugeot versus Alpine (so sort of Renault) in the hot hatch stakes sounds like old times. Let's hope it's as entertaining as it used to be.

PEUGEOT'S GREATEST GTI HITS

1984 205
Often regarded as the definitive hot hatch, despite what our testers called a "marked power-off attitude change". Many ended up in hedges.

1987 309
A longer, more practical and slightly more refined 205. Also delightfully strange by modern standards, as a two-door, four-seat liftback.

1996 106
Just 120bhp was enough to send this featherweight to 60mph in 8.4sec and it could out-handle much more expensive cars too.

2015 208 by Peugeot Sport
Slightly stiffer, more direct version of the previous 208 GTi was a standout against most contemporaries, if not quite as good as a Ford Fiesta ST.

GRANDLAND TURNS 4WD

A 4WD Vauxhall Grandland Electric will arrive in September. Using the same dual-motor set-up as its Peugeot e-3008 cousin, it packs 321bhp for a 6.1sec 0-62mph time. A 73kWh battery gives 311 miles of range.

BIG UPDATE FOR CARPLAY

Apple will boost its CarPlay platform with a major update this year. Arriving as part of iOS 26, it will bring a new look, customisation, and live information such as sports scores on the homepage.

OFFICIAL PICTURES

NEW LEAF READY TO RAISE BAR FOR ELECTRIC CARS

Nissan says unique insights can help Mk3 'set standard for future EVs'

The Nissan Leaf has been reinvented as a sleek SUV with a range of up to 375 miles – and its chief engineer has vowed that it will "set the standard for future electric vehicles".

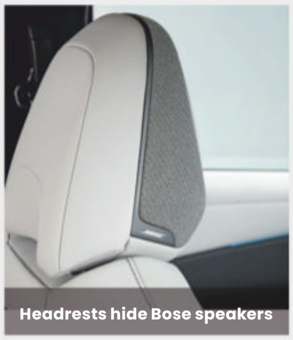
The pioneering EV was launched in 2010 as a mid-sized hatchback but has been entirely reinvented for this third generation to take on the likes of the Skoda Elroq and Kia EV3 in the family crossover class.

The model now sits on the CMF-EV platform that is used by the larger Nissan Ariya and various Renault EVs, meaning it's technically unrelated to the first two generations of Leaf.

However, chief engineer Hiroki Isobe told Autocar that learnings from those cars – gained from more than 700,000 global sales that led to more than 17 billion miles of driving – were invaluable.

"The aim was to set the standard for future electric vehicles," he said. "We're building on the Leaf DNA: it's created for everyday customers and the goal was to create an easy-to-use EV that can be driven without any discomfort. We have a huge database of information about what customers want."

That put the focus on maximising the efficiency of the Leaf, which resulted in an aerodynamically sculpted body, including flush door handles, a steeply raked windscreen and an underfloor cover, combining for a drag coefficient of just 0.25.



Headrests hide Bose speakers

There's also a revamped 'three-in-one' electric motor and a separate heat pump to optimise the efficiency of the heating system. It sits on 18in or 19in tyres, depending on spec.

Two battery options will be offered, with usable capacities of 52kWh and 75kWh, giving the car an official range of 271 or 375 miles. But Nissan emphasises its efficiency at motorway speed, claiming it can cover more than 200 miles at an 80mph cruise.

Unlike previous Leafs, the new car will be equipped in the UK with a CCS charging system, rather than a Chademo one, which can take DC rapid-charging rates of up to 150kW.

The interior has also been completely reinvented, with the dashboard built around a pair of 14.3in screens running a Google-based infotainment system.

Despite the Leaf's new fastback bodystyle, Nissan claims it has plenty of rear head room, while the boot capacity is put at 437 litres.

The Leaf will be offered with a range of semi-autonomous driving technology and a 3.7kW vehicle-to-load outlet.

It will be built and sold globally, including at Nissan's Sunderland factory. That plant has been heavily upgraded and expanded to house production of the Leaf along with the next-generation Juke and Qashqai crossovers, which are both set to sit on the same CMF-EV platform.
JAMES ATTWOOD

■ **NEW LEAF DRIVEN, P30**

Touchscreen has Google-based software, like in the new Micra (see p32)

Ford Capri-esque sloping rear helps to minimise drag

NEW AUDI Q3 UNVEILED WITH FRESH LOOK AND NO STALKS

THE AUDI Q3 SUV has returned for a third generation, bringing a new design and a quite radical interior operational change.

The new version of one of Audi's best-sellers will arrive in September, priced from £38,300.

Among the most interesting changes comes inside, where traditional control stalks have been removed. What Audi refers to as its 'steering wheel control unit' houses everything from drive selection and lighting functions to windscreen wiper operations and even the indicators. All are operated by physical buttons and the panel ends don't move.

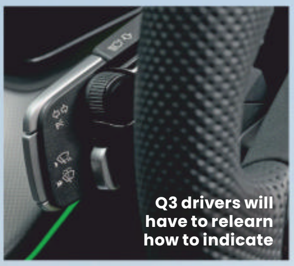
If customer feedback is positive on the new control unit, it is likely to be rolled out across the rest of the range. Audi isn't the first car maker to try to reinvent control stalks: the most notable is Tesla, which removed them altogether from its Model 3, forcing drivers to use touch-sensitive buttons on the steering wheel to activate the indicators. However, it reversed this decision with the facelifted Model Y after negative feedback.

The new Q3 arrives with a fresh exterior design that is a big departure from the more rounded Mk2 car that it replaces.

It borrows much from the new A6 Avant estate, especially the slimmer LED lights up front and light bar at the rear.

The model range opens with a 148bhp four-cylinder mild-hybrid petrol and is topped by a 268bhp plug-in hybrid with 75 miles of electric-only range – double that of the preceding PHEV. A 148bhp four-cylinder diesel is also available – set to be one of the final diesel Audi models.

What remains unclear is the future of the hot RS Q3 variant. The previous generation used the RS3's 394bhp turbo five-pot, but Autocar understands that engine will soon be retired, due to increasingly stringent emission regulations and Audi's push towards EVs.


Q3 drivers will have to relearn how to indicate

OFFICIAL PICTURES

WAIT, THAT'S NOT A POLO?

Volkswagen has begun testing one of its most important models in recent times, the ID 2 electric supermini, on public roads.

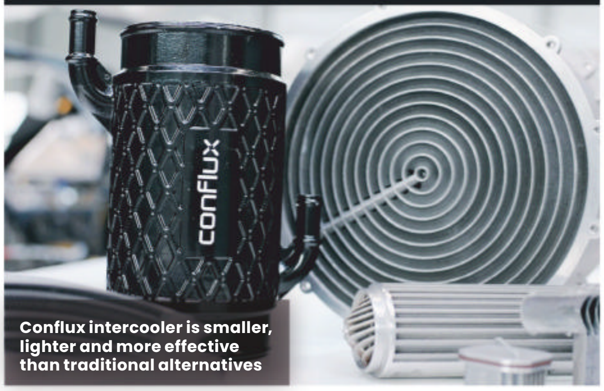
Prototypes are sporting Polo body panels to disguise their identity, but details such as the short front overhang and distinct fascia give them away.

The ID 2 is set to arrive in 2026, priced from less than £22,000.

SPY SHOT

Next big thing

JESSE CROSSE


Conflux intercooler is smaller, lighter and more effective than traditional alternatives

THE F1 TECH DONKERVOORT ACHIEVES BY HITTING 'PRINT'

3D-PRINTING TECHNOLOGY – or, to use its proper name, additive manufacturing (AM) – has progressed fast over the past five years.

Dutch car company Donkervoort is one of the latest to take advantage of its unique benefits, by 3D-printing intercoolers for its forthcoming P24 RS supercar. These were developed by Australia's Conflux, and the technique goes one step further than merely being a convenient way to manufacture things. By using AM, the weight of the aluminium-alloy liquid-to-air intercoolers has been slashed from 16kg to 1.4kg.

Conflux describes the technique as Formula 1 technology (its founder has a background in the sport), and it has other benefits too: this intercooler has superior thermal performance and packaging benefits to conventional equivalents.

It should be tougher too, because it's a single, one-piece structure with no joints or welds.

Donkervoort issued a specification for the intercooler and Conflux actually improved on it, returning a design that was so effective that it could be downsized still further from the original prototype.

Rather than mounted at the front of the car, the compact intercoolers can be sited within the engine bay, reducing the length of the inlet tract by two-thirds. The result is quicker throttle response, better efficiency and optimised weight distribution, all of which directly benefit the driver.

Coolant flowing through the intercooler is dedicated to the job and cooled by an external radiator not shared with any other drivetrain cooling system.

AM is a process whereby, controlled by a 3D computer model, objects are formed by firing lasers into a bed of powdered material, fusing it together.

Conflux makes the new intercoolers from AlSi10Mg, a high-grade aluminium alloy that it claims is one of the most common and well accepted aluminium alloys in the industry. Conflux also uses it for components in aviation, motorsport and industrial applications.

Intercoolers are needed because when air is compressed (by a turbocharger in this case), it heats up and becomes less dense. For maximum performance and trouble-free combustion, an engine needs cool induction air. An intercooler cools down the compressed and heated air before it enters the engine by conducting heat through finned walls into a coolant.

Thanks to the AM process, these fins in the new Conflux intercooler are extremely thin: at 160 microns, just two or three times thicker than a human hair. And the thinner the fins can be, the more effective they will be at conducting away the unwanted heat.

More than that, Conflux uses the advantages of AM to produce sophisticated surface contours, or 'geometries', that take into account the changing thermal properties of the fluids as they pass through the intercooler. That adds up to more efficient heat transfer and, put simply, an intercooler that does a better job.

UK has had a pilot fleet of FCEV iX5 test cars but future sales look unlikely

BMW SEES NO PLACE FOR HYDROGEN CARS IN UK

German company puts another nail in the coffin of FCEV cars in Britain

The UK's limited fuelling infrastructure remains a big stumbling block to the rollout of hydrogen-powered cars and could cause BMW not to offer its planned fuel cell cars here.

Currently, there are just three hydrogen filling stations for cars in the UK, with only three more in the pipeline, according to data from UK H_2 Mobility.

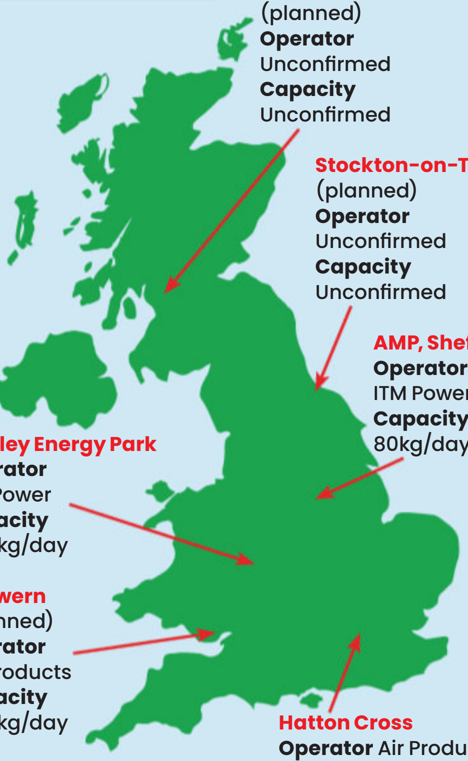
"We sincerely hope that the infrastructure will develop further because right now the UK is not in a condition where [launching] would make sense," said Jürgen Guldner, head of BMW's hydrogen vehicle project, recently.

BMW plans to sell its first series-production fuel cell electric vehicle (FCEV) in 2028. It is expected to be a variant of the upcoming sixth-generation X5.

The firm will use Toyota's fuel cell stack, which converts hydrogen to electricity. Currently, Toyota is the only company offering a fuel cell car in the UK: the £64,690 Mirai saloon.

In 2013, UK H_2 Mobility predicted there would be 1.6 million hydrogen vehicles on Britain's roads by 2030. However battery-electric has since dominated the race for zero-emission propulsion and no fuel cell cars have been sold in the UK so far this year.

WHERE CAN I FILL MY FCEV CAR?



Glasgow (planned)
Operator Unconfirmed
Capacity Unconfirmed

Stockton-on-Tees (planned)
Operator Unconfirmed
Capacity Unconfirmed

AMP, Sheffield
Operator ITM Power
Capacity 80kg/day

Tyseley Energy Park
Operator ITM Power
Capacity 1200kg/day

Llanwern (planned)
Operator Air Products
Capacity 1500kg/day

Hatton Cross
Operator Air Products
Capacity 250kg/day

SOURCE UK H_2 MOBILITY

Globally, the picture is not much better. Sales of all FCEVs, including lorries and buses, fell 22% last year to 12,866, according to figures published by Hydrogen Insights. By contrast, 32,378 battery-electric cars were sold in the UK in May alone, the SMMT's figures show.

DO FCEVs STILL HAVE A PLACE?

Proponents of hydrogen, including BMW and Toyota, argue that fuel cell technology is needed to allow the entire vehicle market to shift to zero-emission propulsion.

"Our research shows that customers would be people who drive longer distances and those who live in the cities," Guldner said. "Our strategy is to have a second technology in our portfolio. Then people can choose which one they want."

Only FCEV car on sale in the UK is the Toyota Mirai

Meanwhile, producers argue that creating green hydrogen is a great way to store renewable energy in those unpredictable periods when too much electricity is being generated.

A range of obstacles exist – some solvable, others less so. The high cost of fuel cell technology would fall if the demand was there, said Guldner. BMW is also comfortable packaging large enough high-pressure tanks into the body structure to give decent range, but currently below that of a diesel equivalent.

WHY NO PUMPS?

Car firms alone can't nudge the infrastructure in the right direction and those best placed to find the money are finding it very difficult after what happened to EV charger companies. They raised a lot of investment to build an infrastructure that turned out to be too big for initial demand.

"A lot of those businesses are really struggling today," said Christopher Jackson, CEO of green hydrogen provider Protium. "Then you come in as a hydrogen player and tell the investors we're going to do something that sounds the same as that. It is a harder story."

Protium is building three hydrogen refuelling stations aimed at lorries and predicts a big jump in demand between 2028 and 2030 as the clock runs down on the government's net-zero targets.

One problem is that, right now, hydrogen isn't competing against battery-electric but cheaper, more convenient fossil-fuelled combustion engines. That won't change until the sale of combustion-engine vehicles running on petrol or diesel is banned from 2035.

Without government help in the form of mandated hydrogen infrastructure or higher tax on fossil fuels or urban bans, the market for FCEVs is essentially dormant until that date.

There's no help here from the Climate Change Committee, an influential government advisory panel. "We see… only a very niche, if any, role [for hydrogen] in surface transport," it said in its seventh Carbon Budget.

NICK GIBBS

HYUNDAI BACKS IT

Nexo FCEV is poised to enter its second generation

Hyundai is one of the highest-profile hydrogen fuel cell advocates and recently revealed a striking second generation of its Nexo FCEV crossover.

It hasn't said whether it is UK-bound but the Mk1 car, which was launched in 2019, has sold just 29 units here.

REx TECH COMEBACK AT BMW

New X5 line-up will offer a range of propulsion, including a return for REx
BM76 WMM
AUTOCAR IMAGE

While BMW mulls the global viability of its upcoming FCEV models (left), it is preparing to reintroduce a range-extender (REx) drivetrain to its line-up as part of a renewed push to offer electric driving without the constraints of charging infrastructure – and its first REx will be the next X5.

Engineering work is claimed to be already well under way in partnership with long-time component supplier ZF. High-ranking BMW sources say the decision to revisit the range-boosting tech comes as global sales of REx models are gaining strong momentum – particularly in China, BMW's largest market by sales volume.

BMW plans to deploy its new REx drivetrain in some of its most popular SUV models for markets where charging networks remain underdeveloped and buyer hesitation around pure-electric drivetrains persists. REx tech is expected to provide potential electric ranges of well over 600 miles between refuelling.

In addition to the X5, a REx drivetrain is also being considered for the recently introduced sixth-generation X3 and the new X7, due in 2026.

BMW first offered a REx production model in 2013, the i3 REx (left). But it has not used the tech on any other models following the i3 REx's retirement in 2018.

A return to REx would mark a change of heart for CEO Oliver Zipse, who said last year that REx tech was too expensive. "There is a limit to the financial logic," he said. "Our PHEVs are currently around the 100km [EV range], which I think is the perfect point where the customer says: 'This is what I would like to pay for.'"

At this stage, it is not known whether REx would be offered as an alternative to the X5's existing plug-in hybrid drivetrain or supplant it.

CHINA'S REx KING

One motive behind BMW's decision to revisit the range-extender is the meteoric rise of China's Li Auto. Founded in Beijing in 2015, it has taken a leading role in the tech and offers four REx models: the L6, L7, L8 and L9. Li Auto's global sales surged past 500,000 in 2024 and it has set an initial target of 700,000 for 2025.

Grapevine

MARK TISSHAW

Siemens' Uday Senapati: "You can test the whole car in the digital world"

CREDIT FOR WHETHER a car is good or not falls almost wholly upon the company whose badge is on the bonnet. But behind any major car maker lies a host of other firms helping to get new models on the road.

Siemens is a global technology company whose hardware and software support all parts of the car industry. Its work covers all aspects of car design, development and manufacturing as well as a car company's wider operations. For example, Siemens' tech was used to reduce the footprint of a factory by 20% at the design stage by simulating and automating the production environment.

We've been getting to know Siemens better, with the company partnering the 2025 Autocar Awards (winners revealed 25 June) and an Autocar Business webinar next week (26 June) to look at the vital role of software in the industry.

Uday Senapati, vice-president for automotive, mobility and battery at Siemens Advanta, its consultancy business, wants to showcase how Siemens "has everything that helps the automotive industry get to the next stage faster and get products to market faster".

Indeed, "mind-blowing" is how one global automotive R&D chief described to me AI software tools they credited with helping speed up car development and, unprompted, he named Siemens as a company leading the way here.

He cited the design and development of a fuel tank installation in a new car. This complex packaging puzzle can take a week to carefully package into the car but was demonstrated by an AI tool that did it in "hours". He called the development of such tools "sudden and aggressive" and "amazing".

Senapati, who has led Lotus's product strategy and was Bentley's Mulliner chief, said Siemens was bolstering its own software capabilities by working with partners and through acquisitions, most notably a recent $10 billion (£7.4bn) acquisition of US-based software simulation company Altair Engineering.

This will help boost a particular speciality of Siemens in creating digital twins of real-life parts, which, says Senapati, covers "the raw material of a battery to a full engine or a full car", to the point where "you can test the whole car in the digital world".

Digital twins are "one area that [legacy] OEMs have not yet embraced or haven't embraced fast enough. If you think of disruptors, especially from China, many have embraced our technologies" in this area, says Senapati.

He claims Chinese OEMs can develop an all-new car on an all-new platform in no more than three years and derivatives and refreshes in half that. In Western OEMs, an all-new car and platform is four years minimum, with refreshes taking three years.

"That's the disruption," says Senapati. "It's not that the technology doesn't exist; it's all there."

> **"Siemens' tech managed to reduce the footprint of a factory by 20%"**

WOMEN FEEL UNWELCOME AND PATRONISED AT SHOWROOMS

Survey finds half believe car buying experience is tailored towards men

The motor trade isn't doing enough to make women feel welcome when they're buying a car, according to new research.

In 2023, almost 17 million women held a UK driving licence, compared with almost 18 million men, and many women buy their own car or are responsible for a shared purchase of one.

Yet in a recent survey of 7500 drivers by Citroën UK, nearly half of the women asked (48%) said their car buying experience was tailored towards male customers. Nearly as many (44%) said they felt patronised by male sales staff and only 25% said they felt comfortable asking for help in a car showroom.

Another result from the survey that should be a cause for concern for a male-dominated industry is that four times as many women as men said they would seek out a female member of staff when buying a new car.

These findings won't surprise those car buyers who take to Mumsnet, a leading parenting forum, to express their frustration about car dealerships.

Founder and CEO Justine Roberts said: "Citroën's findings reflect what we've consistently heard from Mumsnet users over the years: that women are often stereotyped or patronised during the buying process and made to feel like outsiders in car showrooms. However, 95% say they're involved in choosing the family car, with 39% wholly responsible for the purchase.

"It's not necessarily about overt hostility but rather the accumulation of small, dismissive signals that make women feel undervalued. Users share stories of being talked over or ignored in favour of their male partners.

"They also highlight the lack of female representation in dealerships – something which contributes to the persistence of outdated attitudes."

According to the Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI), barely a quarter of people involved in the sale of cars and commercial vehicles in this country are female.

A spokesperson said: "The challenge is that women don't see people who look like them when they go into a car dealership, because there is a significant gender gap in the automotive sector.

"The IMI is helping employers make the sector more attractive to women through its 'There's More to Motor' awareness campaign. This is designed to help more people see the fantastic career opportunities in automotive and showcase women already working in the sector. Many employers report positive responses to recruitment campaigns."

Mumsnet's Roberts has a clear message for all dealers who get it wrong: "Those who fail to create an inclusive environment risk alienating a vital group of female customers who are not only influential in purchasing decisions but also increasingly willing to speak out about bad experiences."

Responding to the results of the Citroën UK survey, managing director Greg Taylor said: "Citroën values every one of its customers and is committed to making sure everyone has a positive purchasing experience when visiting the brand."

JOHN EVANS

Many women seek out a female salesperson when buying a car

A DEALERSHIP WITH A FEMALE FOCUS

One car dealership determined to counter the trend is Wink Cars, based in Tipton, West Midlands. Founded in 2021 by footballing friends Jo Smith, a sales executive who previously worked for dealer groups including Pendragon, and Jodie Barber, a former beautician, its mission is to offer female car buyers a more welcoming car buying experience.

The pair told Autocar they sell around 25 used cars per month.

"Women feel more confident buying from another female," said Smith. "Showrooms can be intimidating, but our customers – men as well as women – tell us they feel more comfortable buying from us."

However, Smith and Barber do believe that dealerships are trying to be relaxing places and beginning to realise the value women can bring to them.

"There's a drive to have more women on the showroom floor," said Barber. "There are opportunities for those women prepared to give the industry a try."

GETTY IMAGES

MY WEEK IN CARS

Steve Cropley

MONDAY

Can there be a car more beguiling for value and versatility than the Dacia Jogger? I say no. At short notice (because my new Renault 5 long-termer was needed elsewhere) I was tucked into a Hybrid model for a day trip that turned out to be 497 miles long, mostly on motorways. Cruising consistently at around 70mph, it returned 54.5mpg overall, having promised a handy 570-mile range when I filled it at the start.

Okay, it's not the perfect car. I would have liked to change the driver's seat cushion angle a degree or two and the tyres were noisy at times, but the Jogger was nearly always brilliant, its petrol-electric powertrain pulling powerfully off the mark and for 60mph-plus passing moves. Especially outstanding in this era of choppy-riding EVs is the Jogger's flat, long-wheelbase ride, all the more amazing because this seven-seater is hardly longer than a Ford Focus.

My choice would be a mid-range Expression in white, with camping pack and towbar, costing less than £25,000. That's a wonderful bargain in anyone's language, and the fun comes free.

TUESDAY

The purpose of my Jogger journey was to accompany a friend with important business at Lotus's Hethel headquarters, and while there I took the long-sought opportunity to spend some time with sports car design guru Russell Carr.

I found him evidently thriving under a new, simplified and much more logical management structure brought by the elevation of Lotus Cars MD Matt Windle to the much more influential position of Lotus Europe CEO. There is evidence that emphasis is turning back to Hethel, which has recently seemed something of a backwater. Carr confirmed that future sports cars are under development but couldn't say much because, as others have confirmed, the timing and specification of future Lotus EVs are problematic.

When I met him, he was happy and busy configuring production versions of the Emerson Fittipaldi series of Evija electric hypercars, several of which have already been delivered.

Hethel never looks exactly rock-solid, but it's definitely improving.

Lotus design chief Carr is working on more electric sports cars to follow Evija

"It's a wonderful bargain, and the fun comes free"

WEDNESDAY

Whenever I visit Hethel, I drive home scheming about buying a new car. My next Lotus will be the 10th (three Elans, two Elises, one Cortina, one Excel, one Seven, one Mk6). The question is always which to choose, and the answer didn't come until I was tucked up at 2am.

Nobody can say Jogger fan Cropley is a man of expensive taste

It has to be a Cortina Mk1, I decided – the one car that combines my admiration for Lotus and Ford, with the aura of Jim Clark, still my hero among drivers, mixed right in.

I owned such a Cortina briefly, but it was a 'rolling restoration' and I'd never have done it justice. It's probably a Goodwood champion by now. By 3am I'd found a couple of possibles, both shockingly expensive, and so begins the struggle between desire and reason…

THURSDAY

Scary statistic: it's now clear that sales of battery-powered pick-ups in the US, hyped to the sky for the 2022 launch of the Ford F-150 Lightning and the Tesla Cybertruck soon afterwards, are disastrous. Automotive News says total sales are about equal to those of the Toyota Tundra, which runs a distant fourth behind the conventional combustion-engined pick-ups of 'the big three'. Apparently punters pre-ordered electric trucks in droves but backed out.

It's bad enough that a massive industry-wide investment in the US's flagship vehicle class has failed, but it strikes me that the blow to the confidence and commitment of future buyers is even more serious. After this, can you imagine a majority of American buyers choosing zero-carbon vehicles by 2035? Especially with Mr Trump encouraging Luddism? Neither can I.

AND ANOTHER THING

At the invitation of General Motors' UK design director, Julian Thomson, Matt Prior and I returned this week to the company's European Advanced Design Centre in Leamington Spa (home of the recently revealed C10 Corvette EV concept) to make an Autocar Meets podcast. He spoke absorbingly on many subjects, and the result will be available from Saturday. Matt and I both really enjoyed Thomson's candid insights, and we hope you will too.

GET IN TOUCH
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PRIOR CONVICTION

Matt Prior

You might have heard that Caterham has found a new engine supplier in Horse (decent name, I think), a joint venture between Renault and Geely.

Horse engines will go into Caterham's Academy racing cars from next year to replace the Ford 1.6-litre Sigma engine, which Ford hasn't made in years. Caterham has been assembling race car engines from a stock of blocks and bought-in parts and stopped using it in road cars some time ago.

The Sigma is a nice engine. Autocar had one in a 140bhp Supersport long-termer that we ran in 2012-13, and I spent a lot of time in it, including an edifying day at Rye House kart circuit to see whether any car could have the handling of a go-kart. The answer was no, of course, but still, I remember it as one of the best driving days of my life.

The Sigma is lighter than the Ford 2.0-litre Duratec engine (which Ford doesn't make any more either) that Caterham now uses in most of its road cars, and it has considerably more power than the kei car-compliant 660cc Suzuki-engined 170. But with the arrival of the Horse engine, the Sigma is finally on its way out.

To mark its run-out, Caterham has announced a special-edition road car, the 310 Encore. The engine is tweaked to 152bhp at 7000rpm, plus you get a lightened flywheel and sports suspension. There are some other upgrades too, there will only be 25 of them and they will cost £39,995.

Of late I've said that my favourite Sevens are the 170 and the 620, the extremes at either end of the scale, but this Encore car might just sit in a sweet spot reminiscent of that old Supersport.

I have lots more to tell you on the Caterham engine front soon, but in the meantime, if you're looking for a Goldilocks Seven, this could be it.

Many car nuts started off in one of these

CALL ME SENTIMENTAL

Plodding through some Aylesbury traffic the other day, I saw a skip in a front garden, then spotted the unmistakable shape of a Little Tikes Cozy Coupe poking out of it, faded and resting on its back atop some building rubble.

Like an old Mini, surely everyone recognises a Cozy Coupe. If you're a younger reader, you might even have had one as your first car. What a sad sight. I think I felt sadder than if I had seen an actual supermini heading off to be scrapped.

Can we agree that there is something melancholic about discarded children's toys? They wouldn't have made four Toy Story movies if there wasn't. And when it's a car as well, the automotive nerd in me stupidly gets the double whammy as what's bluntly some pieces of plastic and metal go off to the great scrapheap in the sky.

> **"If you're looking for a Goldilocks Seven, this could be it"**

Maybe one should try to see this more optimistically. It represents the change of an era, a nipper growing into the next phase of their life – hopefully one that involves Tamiya or Scalextric, their enthusiasm having been fuelled by them Flintstoning themselves around house and garden in a Cozy Coupe as a toddler.

A certain bittersweetness, then. But so help me, it was all I could do to stop myself retrieving the thing and embarking on a full restoration before finding somewhere to donate it.

CLICKBAIT CLAPTRAP

I'm loath to criticise other journalists and media commentators, because we've all got pressures and we all screw things up from time to time. But I just can't cope with the number of quarterwits from purported news outlets who are gleefully reporting and revelling in the fact that Jaguar registered only 49 new cars across Europe in April, down 97% on last year, and notching it up as some kind of victory in the fight against Jaguar's recent rebranding.

As you will probably know, Jaguar isn't making any cars until its new model arrives next year. So whatever is being registered will be the last of some old stock or maybe even new prototypes. The short of it is that Jaguar has no cars to sell.

One can disagree with that decision; it's clearly not the mark of a company that has made good calls with a brand over previous decades. And one might not like the idea of the new car or the rebranding either. But to paint these figures as a failure of those when Jaguar hasn't even begun trying to sell the new car yet is nonsense.

GET IN TOUCH
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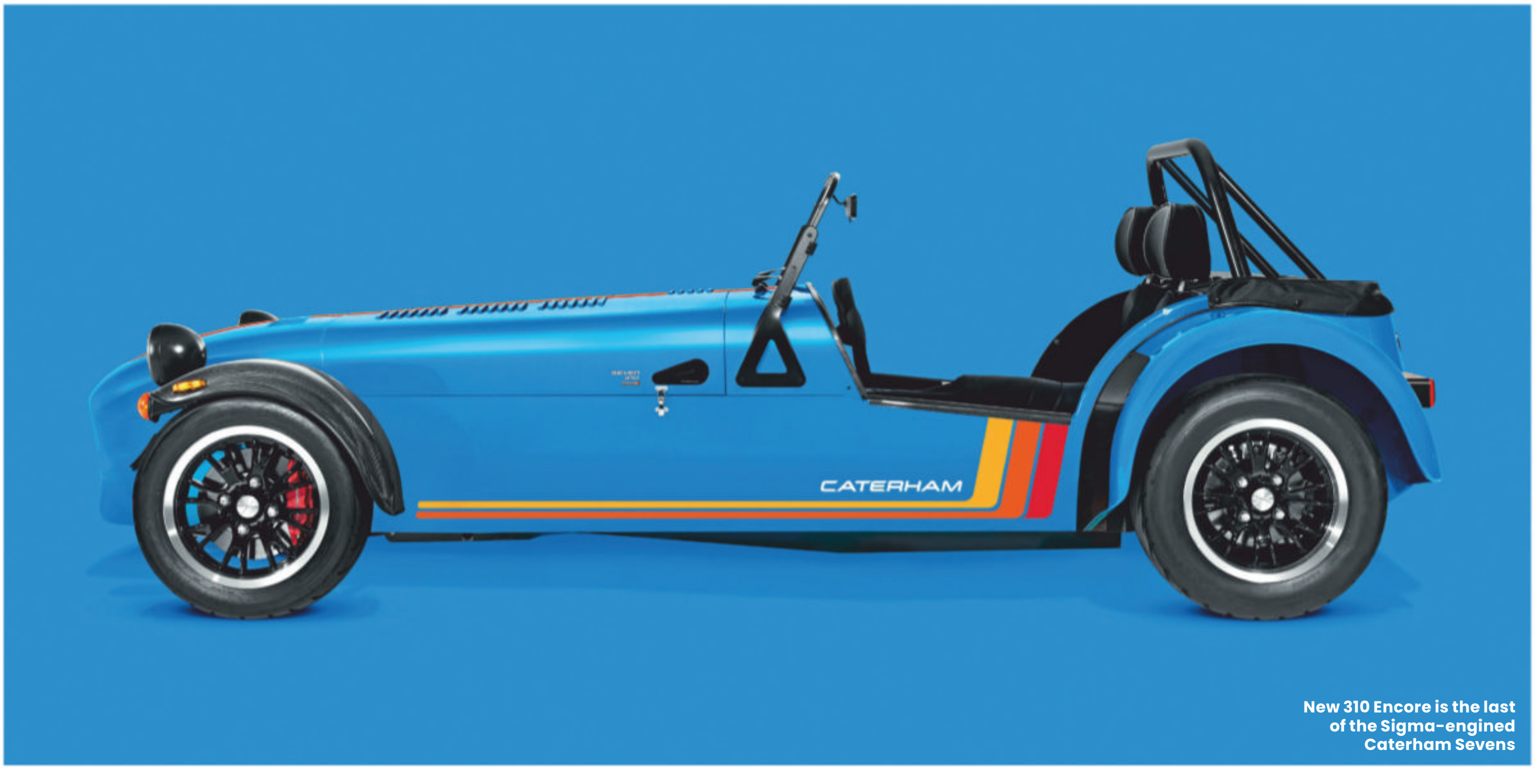


New 310 Encore is the last of the Sigma-engined Caterham Sevens

LITTLETIKES.CO.UK

RACING LINES

Damien Smith

Fords and Hyundais are clearly the class of the BTCC field this season

Just nine points separate title rivals Ash Sutton and Tom Ingram as the British Touring Car Championship arrives in Cheshire this weekend for three more races at Oulton Park. At the season's halfway mark, Sutton has three wins to Ingram's single victory, but the Excelr8 Hyundai driver's consistency, taking six runner-up finishes, has pitched him as the biggest threat to the Alliance Ford ace's bid for a record fifth BTCC crown.

But is this season really turning into a two-horse race? Sutton's team-mate Dan Rowbottom is up to third after wins at Snetterton and last time out at Thruxton. He's 49 points off the top, but all it takes is a bad weekend for either or both Sutton and Ingram and the picture will change, with so many hard-racing miles left to run.

REAL CLASS ACTS

Sutton and Ingram's pre-eminence in the BTCC was on full display at Thruxton, during a fraught weekend at the UK's fastest circuit. Sutton took his first pole position of the campaign on a wet Saturday but lacked power in the dry race one as Ingram finally scored his first win of the season. They made contact twice at the chicane. Ingram was unlucky that the safety car was called just seconds before his well-executed first pass for the lead and that meant he was forced to give the place back. Second time around, late-braking Sutton forced the pair wide to cut the chicane completely, but Ingram had fully earned his win before a blocked air intake cost Sutton speed and dropped him back to finish only fourth.

Still, that set him up to shine in race two, via a sensational start. From the grid's second row, he cut his Focus ST between Dan Cammish's equivalent and Josh Cook's Honda Civic Type R, then sliced inside Ingram's i30 N Fastback into the sweeping first turn (Allard) to take a lead that he wouldn't lose. Phenomenal driving.

> "He gathered a scary high-speed spin in a single liquid motion"

But his save in the partially reversed-grid race three probably scooped it as moment of the day. Reigning champion Jake Hill apologised for the unintentional tap that pushed Sutton into a scary high-speed spin out of the rapid Noble left-hander. How Sutton gathered the moment and kept his foot in, all in a single liquid motion, might well prove crucial to the title outcome given how tight it is with Ingram. A damage-limiting fifth kept his score ticking over as Ingram followed his runner-up finish in race two with another. The pair are a class apart right now.

Then again, Rowbottom won't count himself out from hunting them down, given his current form. How he pulled what is becoming his signature pass on Hill's BMW at Segrave, the final right-hander of Thruxton's tricky complex, showed off his new-found composure and confidence after a trying couple of seasons in the BTCC. Oulton's dips and rises await to catch out even the best. Catch the action live on ITV, or even better from trackside this Sunday. The BTCC has never been better.

Ogier triumphed in Sardinia, with points leader Evans in fourth

YET ANOTHER RECORD

Another round of the World Rally Championship, another record for evergreen Sébastien Ogier. Following success in Portugal, the Frenchman moved clear of old rival Sébastien Loeb with his fifth victory on Rally Italy Sardinia, despite a late scare on the final stage. Rally Greece is next at the end of this month, but 41-year-old Ogier – who has won three of the six WRC rounds so far this year – still refuses to rally full time, putting family life ahead of his sport. That's admirable, especially as one more title would lift him to nine, equal with Loeb – but at his age, that's just not where his motivation lies.

Still, he's only 19 points behind Toyota team-mate Elfyn Evans, whose status as points leader is tugging back his title aspirations. Top of the table means you're first out on the road in the WRC, and so often, as essentially the event road sweeper, that's a massive disadvantage. So it was in the dust of Sardinia and a steady run to fourth, despite a Saturday puncture, was just about the best Evans could manage on the Italian island.

Ahead of him, Ogier revelled in another spirited battle with Hyundai's Ott Tänak, but a literal stuck-in-a-rut moment in the final miles almost switched the order. Ogier was forced into reversing after nosing into a small tree, but still he made it home 7.9sec ahead of Tänak.

The biggest threat to Evans' title hopes might well be another team-mate, Kalle Rovanperä, third in Sardinia, only a point off Ogier's tally and back rallying full time this year after his own partial campaign in 2024. Twenty points can quickly be overturned at this stage of a season. Evans has his work cut out to thwart Rovanperä's bid for a third WRC crown at the age of just 24.

YOUR VIEWS

WRITE TO autocar@haymarket.com

GREAT ESCAPE

I finalised my purchase of a new Suzuki Swift Motion this week and had an interesting chat with the car salesman. He had been a long-time employee of the Suzuki dealership (more than 15 years) but admitted to a brief dalliance working at a Jaguar Land Rover dealership.

He recounted his one or two years there with the look of someone still battling PTSD. He shared how his days were filled with direct and demanding customers filling his in-tray and voicemail with their myriad complaints, and how as he had left, his colleagues had wheeled out a top-of-the-range Defender to tempt him to stay but by that point he had had enough of the vehicles.

He spoke about his return to Suzuki warmly as if returning home. He said the customers were more pleasant and he never received any complaints about the cars.

This seems a classic case of how it's much better to under-promise and over-deliver than the opposite, which JLR appears to do.

Name supplied
Via email

IF IT CAN GO WRONG...

I am never going to drive or ride in a driverless car. I like technology: day to day, among other things, my heating and hot water are controlled by Hive and I have a video doorbell with connected remote cameras. But recently both went wrong: my thermostat refused to speak to my receiver and my doorbell refused to ring. Both needed resetting or a new part. I can therefore guarantee that a driverless car *will* go wrong at some time – and I don't want to be driving it when the computer fails to tell the brakes to work when a bus pulls out in front of me.

Malcolm Richardson
Eynsford, Kent

BEST OF BOTH

The recent Head to Head between Jonathan Bryce and Sam Phillips (4 June) caught my eye, as I have experience in both cars discussed.

I think I have the answer to their duel. Indeed, I have owned it for 13 years of glorious motoring: a BMW 125i M Sport Convertible. There you are: a smooth 3.0-litre straight six and a manual stick in a cabriolet with the practicality of a small, rear-wheel-drive coupé.

We can sleep in peace until the next Head to Head.

Simon Burgon
West Sussex

GETTY IMAGES

Letter of the week

LOOKING OUT FOR EACH OTHER

I feel compelled to register some praise for a maligned group of drivers: the professionals who deliver our essentials – both in vans and HGVs, but particularly the latter. I frequently commute down the M1 and into London by car and by motorcycle. Most days it is starkly obvious that the levels of awareness and consideration shown by such professional drivers are far above those of most others. For example, they often avoid creeping forward in slow traffic so that I can ride through a gap while filtering. Some will even move sideways in their lane. That requires actually looking in their mirrors and appreciating that we are a community of road users.

Modern cars are getting wider, which narrows passing opportunities, plus I'm not sure that having ADAS does anything to increase pride in driving or courtesy. I do wonder if the additional monitoring makes some drivers more comfortable to wind down their concentration level, because it feels like the car is responsible for looking after them. Or they may be prodding a screen! I do, however, find it reassuring to see the mirror illumination of blindspot monitoring while I ride past slow-moving traffic on the North Circular Road.

PS. Having owned a Mazda MX-5 for a year now, I can definitely confirm that there's a community of MX-5 drivers who are always ready with a friendly wave. You know you do. The world is a better place for it.

Gary Bruguier, via email

SCREWS LOOSE

Further to Peter Slegg's letter regarding punctures (4 June), I would agree that they have become increasingly common over the past 10 years. I've had two so far this year, thankfully both repairable.

However, I'm not sure the cause is unswept roads, rather careless tradesmen. Every time we have a tradesman to our house, he leaves a puddle of screws on the drive. Take a look around the car park of any DIY store and you will see the same: screws and nails on the ground at the rear of parking spaces where they have escaped from vans.

David Taylor
Via email

TAKE BACK CONTROL

Reading further into Illya Verpraet's Testing, Testing article of 4 June, I found myself agreeing ever more enthusiastically with his main point. Cruise control says it all – except, as he points out, we are not in control. Adaptive cruise control dominates the market over the standard version, with just the Toyota Corolla, Mazda 3 and Mazda MX-30 identified so far as enabling simple switchover choice between the two functions.

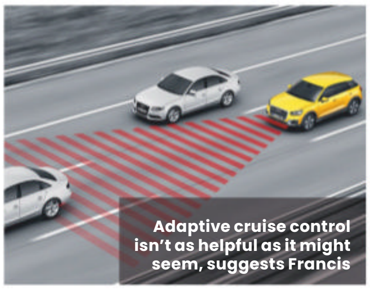
How can ACC be deemed safer when, as Illya rightly points out, it demands ever more attention from our senses than is necessary over standard cruise control?

Rather than control freakery, as Illya suggested, preferring the latter speaks to sensible and balanced attention across all the risks of daily motoring, without adding more and needless distractions.

It's well understood that modern cars must adhere to updated legislation, but once these features are built in, please, manufacturers, enable a customisable button so

Suzuki: appealing cars, great dealers, friendly customers

Simon heartily recommends a soft-top 1 Series



Adaptive cruise control isn't as helpful as it might seem, suggests Francis that we can make grown-up choices for ourselves.

Francis Samuels
East Renfrewshire

BMW Group, non-MEB-based Ford and JLR cars also give you the option. Glad I'm not alone – IV

TAXED INTO ABSURDITY

Matt Prior's comments about road tax (Prior Conviction, 4 June) rang a bell with me. A few years ago, I bought a 2006 Aston Martin V8 Vantage thinking it was a March car with a £300-ish tax disc, only to find it had been registered in April and I was liable for the full-fat £700 charge. All the more galling as my insurance was only £250. Earlier I had owned a 2010 Ford Focus ST whose official CO_2 emissions scraped home on the limit of 225g/km (not 255g/km, as stated in Matt's piece). What careful calibration!

Nick Tiley
Cambridge

For a car first registered between March 2001 and March 2017, official CO_2 emissions between 201g/km and 225g/km incur £430 VED, rising to £735 for cars emitting between 226g/km and 255g/km and £760 for anything over that – MP

I'M NO OLD FART

It is not often I write to a magazine, and having read Steve Cropley for decades, it is particularly disappointing that it is he who has roused my ire.

The sidebar to his 4 June column was gratuitous and worthy of The Sun newspaper, not Autocar.

Kids in the megapolis prefer electric vehicles… amazing, considering that every child from kindergarten these days has the environment (or the official version thereof) drilled into them.

Just because some survey threw up that result, it is insupportable nonsense to extrapolate that only "old farts" hate EVs.

Many, many people dislike the cost, the range anxiety, the depreciation and the apparent close co-development with white goods and computer consoles.

The truth is that electric is a solution, not the solution. Yes, for youngsters living in a polluted megapolis, one can see the logic. For a farmer in rural Scotland, for example, it becomes a somewhat different issue.

Steve, please stick to the facts.

Peter Hughes
Via email

Weekly winner

Letter of the week wins this ValetPro exterior protection and maintenance kit worth £48

GREAT REASONS TO BUY

Next week's issue

ON SALE 25 JUNE

100-PAGE SPECIAL ISSUE

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FIRST DRIVES

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HOW WE TEST CARS

Autocar delivers several kinds of reviews on new cars, with different levels of technical and functional scrutiny. As the name suggests, our First Drives section typically addresses cars that we're driving for the first time – either in final production form or as late prototypes. Time in the car can be limited here, technical and equipment specification might not be finalised and some systems software may not be to production specification. For those reasons, First Drive reports don't have star ratings.

Once we have driven a car for a second time in the UK, in right-hand-drive form and typically at greater length, we will rate it, either as part of a shorter UK test report or as the subject of a full, instrumented Road Test.

In the latter case, we take empirical performance and refinement benchmarks from it at Horiba MIRA proving ground, as well as subjective limit handling impressions, plus key measurements of practicality, efficiency and kerb weight.

All UK tests and Road Tests receive proper verdicts with star ratings informed by everything we have learned and the combined impressions and experience of several testers.

TESTED 9.6.25, VAUD, SWITZERLAND **ON SALE** NOVEMBER

DS Nº8

French premium brand starts afresh (again) with a big electric executive car

Welcome to what DS was always supposed to be. With its recent past as essentially a vendor of posh Citroëns swept under the rug, Stellantis's boutique French brand has aspirations of moving into the luxury market, but with this bespoke new N°8 flagship is making a renewed push to lure buyers away from the German executive brands.

On first encounter with this genre-bender, with its lofty ride height, fastback roofline and limousine-like rear doors, rivals don't immediately spring to mind, but the Polestar 4, Mercedes GLC and Audi Q6 E-tron are cited as key benchmarks. Importantly, though, DS has priced the N°8 more in line with cars from the class below (think Q4 E-tron) to give it an edge when it comes to value for money.

As DS's recent struggles show, the premium EV segment is a notoriously tough part of the market – particularly for a newish brand that has still to crack the UK in the same way that, say, Polestar and Cupra have in the same sort of timeframe.

The N°8 indirectly replaces the combustion-engined 9 saloon as DS's flagship, and if that car's performance is anything to go by (nine sales last year and just 139 in the four years it was available), it's going to have a tough time luring fleet buyers down the road to the diamond-clad DS dealership on design and equipment alone.

It has more than a fighting chance on paper, though, courtesy of its more crowd-pleasing crossover-ish styling, plus some compelling performance and equipment attributes.

Starting at £50,790 and topping out at £63,290 for the most potent version, the N°8 is cheaper across the board than its closest Swedish and German contemporaries, and with a massive maximum range of 466 miles from the longest-legged variant, it's got them (and nearly all other mainstream EVs) licked for endurance, too.

It shares its STLA Medium platform with the new Peugeot 3008, Vauxhall Grandland and Citroën C5 Aircross but is ▸

DS AUTOMOBILES
N°8
HC·311·XL

TESTER'S NOTE

The 14-speaker Focal system that comes with Étoile trim deserves a shout out. It passed my standard test with flying colours, taking Radiohead's Kid A up to (deafening) max volume without distorting the bass or drowning out the glockenspiel echo. **FP**

> **"The secondary ride is impressively cushioned, especially in the context of a 2.2-tonne crossover on 21in wheels"**

◂ differentiated from those quite traditional mid-sized SUVs by a more rakish and lower-slung silhouette that lends a dash of luxo-saloon appeal. It's a similar length to its cousins, at 4.8m bumper to bumper, but stands shorter at just under 1.6m tall (similar to the Genesis GV60 and Kia EV6, for reference).

There's a choice of two batteries and three motor configurations: a 73.7kWh pack gives the basic 227bhp single-motor car an official range of 355 miles, while the 276bhp front-driver upgrades to a huge 97.2kWh pack for that headline 466-mile range figure. Crowning the line-up is a dual-motor option with 375bhp and the bigger pack for a range of 407 miles. All can charge at a fairly competitive 160kW for a theoretical 20-80% top-up in 27 minutes.

But for all its long-distance limo pretences, the N°8 looks unlikely to become the chauffeur's default EV de choix. Leg room isn't especially impressive in the rear, and while the glass roof helps to mitigate the loss of head room that comes with a sloping roofline, I had only a few centimetres between my 5ft 9in self and the glass so couldn't help but feel a touch hemmed in.

Meanwhile, although the official boot capacity of 560 litres is roughly on a par with the Skoda Enyaq's and Volkswagen ID 4's, the N°8's sloping rear means there's almost no space above the shoulder line, so it isn't as practical as those straighter-backed SUVs for lugging bulky loads.

Materially and visually, though, the N°8's cockpit feels almost every inch the credible premium contender, with plush, tactile trimmings used throughout and plenty of clever, intricate design elements to occupy the eye.

A particularly nice touch is the wraparound aluminium dashboard panel, which flows into a striking endplate that triples up as an ambient lighting panel, a door grab handle and a speaker bezel. Neat.

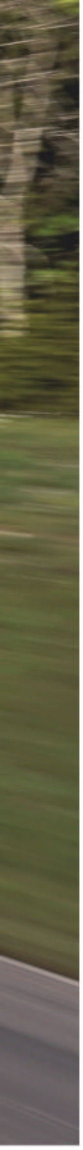
There's a decent balance between physical and digital controls, too, and although the 16in touchscreen is among the outright largest on the market, it's wide rather than tall so doesn't tower distractingly above the dashboard and is easy to ignore when you don't need it. It's decently responsive, too, and easy to navigate after a bit of familiarisation. Extra marks for having an actual button that takes you straight to the ADAS deactivation screen.

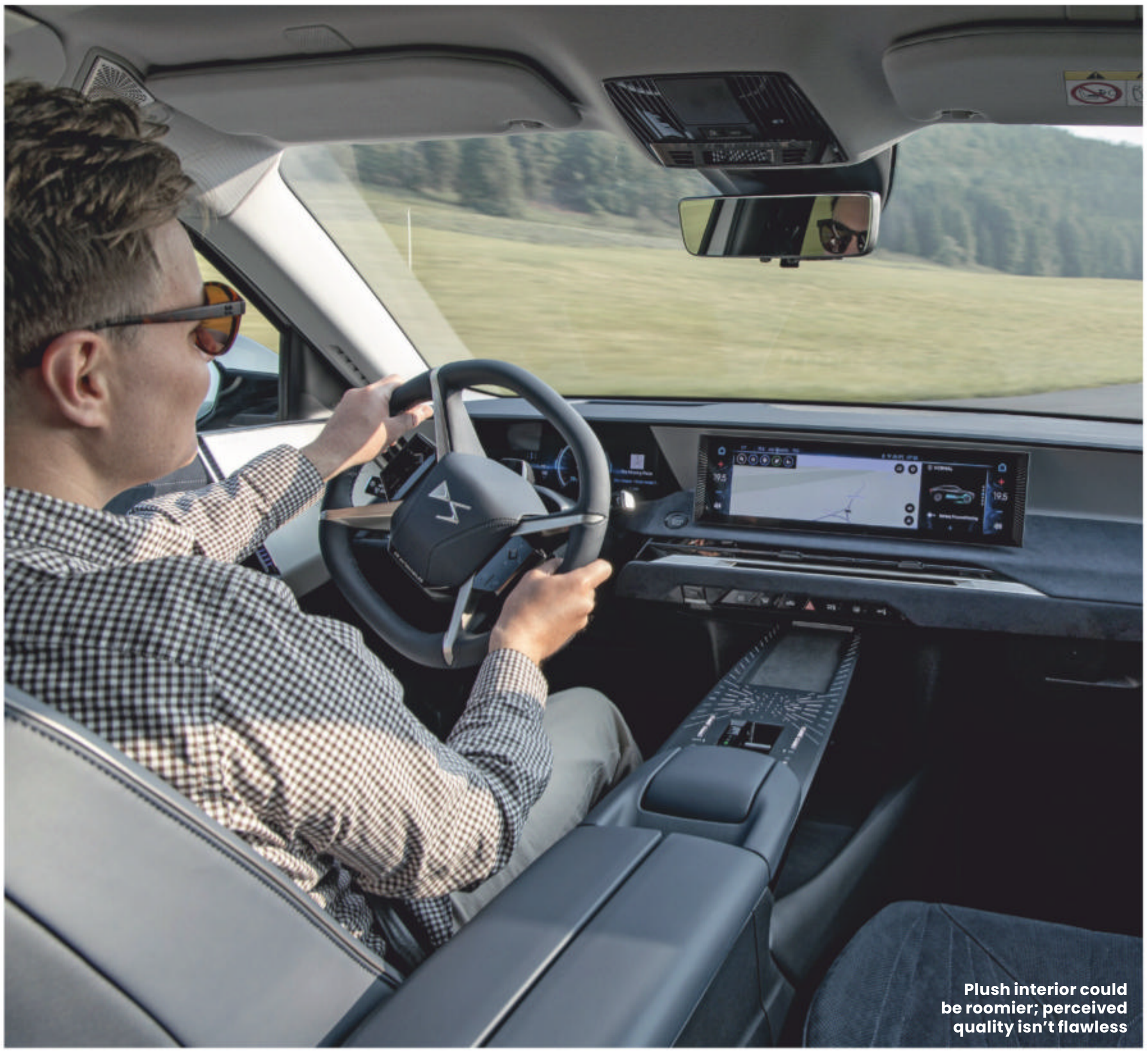
Ride is eminently soft, but it can corner quite smartly, too

So far, so plush – so long as you can forgive DS's deployment of some lower-calibre switchgear from its Stellantis sibling brands. Most of the buttons, stalks and switches are familiar from Peugeot, Citroën and Vauxhall models, and their plasticky cheapness feels at odds with what is broadly a pleasingly opulent ambience.

I drove both the long-range FWD car and the range-topping AWD variant on the launch in the Jura Mountains, and while both have their merits, it's the former that feels the better-rounded and more practical proposition for daily use – not least for its massive range.

Even with half the driven wheels and two-thirds of the power, it feels more than generously endowed. Its 276bhp is meted out considerately but effectively through the front, with a smooth and predictable throttle response that encourages swift progress without verging on that sort of stabby, frenetic accelerative response that can be the undoing of a plush EV.





Plush interior could be roomier; perceived quality isn't flawless

WILL N°8 REMAIN ELECTRIC-ONLY?

The N°8 is the only car based on Stellantis's new STLA Medium platform (and indeed the only current car within the 14-brand group) to be offered exclusively as an EV, but DS isn't ruling out the possibility of an ICE version.

DS future products boss Cyprien Laurentie told us that "technically it's always a possibility" but "we still need to convince people" of the viability of a pure-electric offering in this segment.

"If you're a bit open-minded, you have no real compromise here," he added, highlighting the N°8's 466-mile maximum range figure. "With this kind of car, you don't really make a sacrifice: it's perfect for commuting and travelling."

He suggested that most EV sceptics "have never tried" an EV and said "we need to find a way to make them try" – but added that "we will keep a close eye on the market and adapt if necessary".

The other STLA Medium cars – the Citroën C5 Aircross, Peugeot 3008 and Vauxhall Grandland – all offer a mildly hybridised petrol engine and a PHEV system that musters an electric range of about 50 miles.

There are two trim levels, Pallas and Étoile, and the latter adds DS's Active Scan Suspension system, which monitors the road ahead for potholes and cracks and preloads the adaptive dampers accordingly, helping to isolate the seat base and steering column from imperfections that tend to be especially noticeable in a quiet, heavy car such as this.

Indeed, the secondary ride is impressively cushioned, and especially so in the context of a 2.2-tonne crossover on 21in wheels. It's not exactly reminiscent of the original Citroën DS's pillowy hydropneumatic arrangement but is more than competitive with rivals for rough road refinement – which bodes well for its ability to contend with our decidedly un-Swiss road network.

On smoother, freer-flowing stretches, the N°8 relaxes into a soft, lolloping gait that encourages a languid and relaxed driving style in keeping with its quasi-VIP billing. There's inevitably a fair bit of lean to contend with in quicker bends and a slow bounciness over undulating terrain, but its relatively low ride height and thoughtful damping keep it from rolling and pitching especially harshly, and it never felt anything less than sure-footed, composed and malleable.

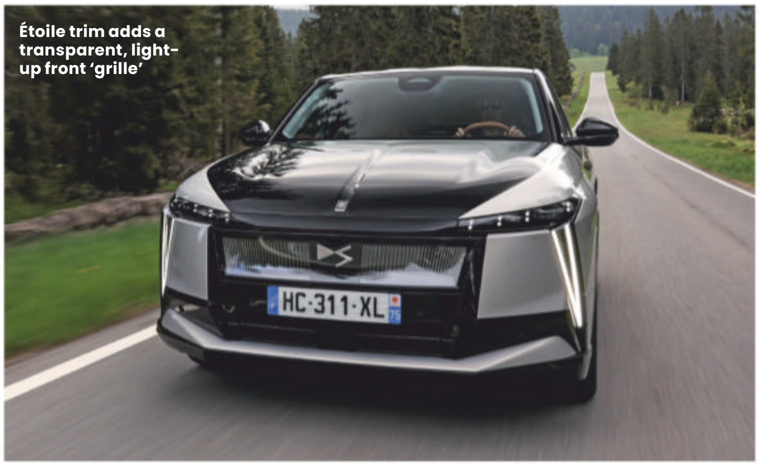
It was decently quiet at a high-speed cruise, too, with just faint wind buffeting around the mirrors to speak of at 80mph.

Its commendable predictability and manoeuvrability doesn't extend to an especially engaging driving experience, however. Even in Sport driving mode in the top-rung AWD car (which is on a par with the base Porsche Macan Electric for power and straight-line performance), the steering is fairly numb and the N°8's treatment of a twisting mountain pass more clinical than charismatic.

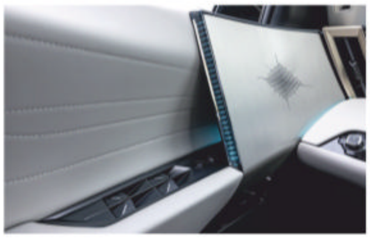
It's not helped by the unusual X-spoked steering wheel, which you feel counterintuitively obliged to grip at three and nine, as you might on track in a full-bore sports car, or its unignorable bulk: it's a big car, at 1920mm wide, and you're conscious of every millimetre when fronting up with a tractor on a tight country lane.

None of that does much to dent the N°8's appeal as a comfortable and lavishly appointed everyday cruiser, though. It has a tough battle ahead in winning the hearts and minds of traditionally brand-loyal premium car buyers, but it more than merits consideration on the basis of what it offers for the price, and perhaps more so because its distinct quirkiness sets it apart from a sea of generally homogenous alternatives.

FELIX PAGE



Étoile trim adds a transparent, light-up front 'grille'



TECH SPEC

DS N°8 HIGH RANGE ETOILE

A refreshingly different take on the electric executive car that manages to undercut rivals while majoring on premium desirability

Price £59,225
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 276bhp
Torque 254lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 2180kg
0-62mph 7.8sec
Top speed 118mph
Battery 97.2kWh (usable)
Range, economy 466 miles, 4.8mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Audi Q6 E-tron, BMW i4, Polestar 4

TESTED 29.5.25, SEOUL, SOUTH KOREA **DELIVERIES** SEPTEMBER

KIA EV4

Latest eye-catching EV from bullish Kia muscles in on Model 3's patch

One of many remarkable things about Tesla is that so much of its growth has been built on a bodystyle that has seemingly long gone out of fashion. The success that the Model 3 has achieved as a fairly traditional, low-sitting saloon defies logic when every other car maker is packing its range full of crossovers and SUVs, backfilled by evergreen hatchbacks.

While there have been other saloons (most notably the BMW i4) among a sea of crossovers and hatchbacks flooding the EV market, the amount of true Model 3 rivals barely makes a puddle.

The EV4 is Kia's first electric saloon and, as a global model from a car maker with one of the industry's better EV line-ups in terms of breadth and quality, its long range and attractive price allow it to be considered a true Model 3 rival.

Even so, given its global footprint and the need to tailor to different markets, Kia hasn't gone all in on the EV4 as a saloon: it's also offering it as a hatchback. This will be the first Kia EV built in Europe, specifically Slovakia.

Kia UK recognises that the Model 3 is very much onto something, so it will offer the booted EV4 here as well to make sure that Tesla doesn't have the electric saloon segment all to itself. And it's this version I'm testing in Kia's native South Korea, where the EV4 has gone on sale first.

The EV4 sits on the same E-GMP platform as the EV3 crossover, and the two share very similar specs. They use a 400V electrical architecture (the larger EV6 and EV9 run at twice that voltage) and offer either a 58.3kWh or 81.4kWh battery. That's paired with a front-mounted electric motor making 201bhp and 209lb ft of torque, and the EV4's 0-62mph time is between 7.4sec and 7.7sec, depending on the battery and bodystyle combination.

The version with the longest range is the saloon with the larger battery, managing 391 miles. With the smaller battery, the saloon has a 267-mile range. In the hatchback, the smaller battery yields 255 miles of range and the larger battery 367 miles. A DC fast charge from 10-80% takes around half an hour.

Impressive enough numbers, yet there will be those who won't

“Kia has found a nice balance between tech and screens and physical buttons and switches”

There’s a delightfully airy, comfort-focused vibe about the interior

even get as far as looking at the spec sheet. Even Kia design boss Karim Habib admits that the look of the EV4 saloon is “polarising”, although he loves what his team created, having set out to “redefine what a saloon can be”.

It certainly beats the Model 3 for visual interest. The EV4 has echoes of a Lamborghini at the front end in how the angles of the windscreen and bonnet are almost parallel. Then at the rear there’s more of a long-tail design, which helps give it a super-slippery drag coefficient of just 0.23 – a best-in-class figure.

Despite how atypical it is from a normal saloon, the EV4 is still recognisable as a Kia and fits within the brand’s wider range. Habib says it was originally only planned to be a hatchback and the idea for the saloon came later.

I like the boldness of it. After a while, the shock factor subsides and you’re left to admire so many little exterior design details; it’s the kind of car you want to touch and run your hand over to follow the shapes and lines. It’s certainly not a Toyota Camry.

The EV4 saloon is marginally longer than the Model 3, at 4730mm, and that itself is 300mm longer than the EV4 hatchback.

The boot of the saloon is 490 litres to the 435 litres of the hatchback. The saloon’s boot is wide near the access point and narrows towards the cabin, but it’s a vast space and can even handle a set of golf clubs loaded horizontally.

The interior is largely recognisable as the excellent cabin of the EV3 but with a few distinctive points of its own.

The nearly flat floor really comes into its own in the saloon to make it all feel so light and spacious, particularly in the rear. This car may be low-slung, but that doesn’t mean it feels cramped.

The GT-Line trim of my test car brought with it some nice ribbed seat materials, too, which act as a further point of difference and are super-comfortable.

More broadly, Kia has found a nice balance between technology and screens and physical switches and buttons here, with the EV4’s switchgear and major controls all falling intuitively to hand.

There’s a pleasing heft and ▸

> “It feels a bit racier than the EV3; you feel more connected to the road”

TESTER’S NOTE

There’s no UK pricing for the EV4 yet, but it’s expected to be priced and positioned alongside the EV3 and with the same trim levels, so starting at about £33k, or £36k in long-range form. **MT**

◂ quality to everything too, and the materials look and feel modern.

The EV3 has a lot of objective qualities, but to drive it lacks some sparkle. It doesn’t do anything wrong; you’re just left looking for a bit more character. And there is a bit more character in the EV4, which is mostly down to it being a saloon.

Given that the vast majority of EVs are crossovers of some shape or size, it’s a novelty at first to sit much lower in the EV4. It feels a bit racier; you feel more connected to the road than in the EV3, and you can nip and dart around the traffic more and find more pleasure even in suburban traffic.

The roads of my Korean test route were flat and lacking in the kinds of corners where you can really get to know a car. But the ride seemed comfortable, more on the soft side than the firm, and I never reached the limits of grip.

It feels like it has more of an edge than the EV3, if not exactly transformative in character.

The steering feels a bit springy and odd immediately off-centre and could do with feeling more natural, yet it’s precise enough and the EV4 is an easy car to place.

A different chassis tune will be given to European-market EV4s, though, so some of this should be taken with a pinch of salt.

The power delivery is just right and the accelerator pedal has a happy knack of knowing how much go you’re looking for.

There are different driving modes: Eco, Normal and Sport, and this is a rare mainstream EV in that Sport mode does actually make it feel a bit sportier, rather than simply faster with more heft to the steering and sharper responses or more power from the motor.

The range is a real highlight of the EV4 saloon. I was getting an indicated 356 miles on a warm day made up largely of faster motorway driving. Efficiency seems to have been notably improved over the EV3 to that end.

It’s easy to adjust the level of regenerative braking with the paddles on the back of the steering wheel and, as we’ve come to expect with Kias, one-pedal driving is seamless and very easy to do.

The EV4 saloon is a good EV and a good car, too. It has bold looks and an excellent interior, and it’s some clever and more inspired chassis tuning away from being a car that I would recommend as much for the way it drives as the way it looks.

The hatchback is inevitably going to be the stronger seller, but however that car ends up, even on looks alone the saloon feels like a model in its own right, rather than a derivative. However niche it may end up being, it’s still one of the more notable and interesting additions to the EV world.

MARK TISSHAW

Saloon’s extra 500mm of length over the hatchback is all aft of the C-pillar

TECH SPEC

KIA EV4 LONG RANGE GT-LINE

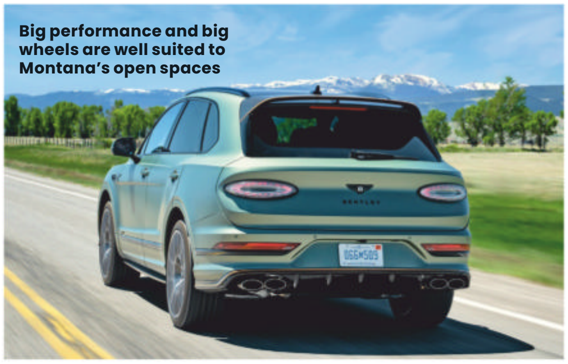
More than a mere hatchback with a boot, the EV4 saloon is a worthy alternative to the Tesla Model 3

Price £36,000 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 201bhp
Torque 209lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1900kg
0-62mph 7.7sec
Top speed 106mph
Battery 81.4/78.0kWh (total/usable, est)
Range, economy 391 miles, 5.0mpkWh (est)
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals BYD Seal, Peugeot e-408, Tesla Model 3

TESTED 6.6.25, BOZEMAN, MONTANA, US **DELIVERIES** AUTUMN

BENTLEY BENTAYGA SPEED

New super-SUV has enough V8 grunt to outdrag an Aston Martin DB12


Big performance and big wheels are well suited to Montana's open spaces

Seats get new quilt design and colourways; you can swap chrome for dark tint

A drift mode and titanium plumbing from a respected but extroverted Slovenian supplier are not what we commonly associate with Bentley, or indeed SUVs. Then again, Bentley has successfully gone racing with the improbable, 2.3-tonne Continental GT3 and once enlisted Juha Kankkunen to fire a bioethanol-powered, rag-top Conti Supersports to more than 200mph on a frozen bit of the Baltic Sea. Nobody can say the company doesn't have a bit of an unpredictable streak.

This is the new Bentayga Speed. The main thing is that the old 6.0-litre W12 engine is out, its 626bhp and 664lb ft supplanted by a lighter 4.0-litre twin-turbo V8 with more power and only a fraction less torque. Performance is monstrous – think 193mph and a BMW M5 Touring-beating 0-60mph time – but the suspension calibration in Comfort mode is as per the regular Bentayga, so it has manners too.

With a starting price of £219,000 (with an awful lot of head room for optional spend), the Speed slots into the Bentayga range between the standard V8 and the flagship EWB.

You can most easily tell it apart from the others by its vast 23in wheels (optional, but most will have them), which facilitate 440mm carbon-ceramic front brake discs – the largest of any production car. Those and the big spoiler.

Engage Sport mode and the damping rates are pumped up 15% versus the regular car and the mapping for the eight-speed ZF automatic gearbox and the throttle response are sharpened.

There's also a fruity new optional exhaust system from Akrapovic (that titanium construction saves 12.5kg) and retuned stability control electronics. If you have the ESC in its Dynamic setting, the Speed's brake-based torque vectoring is now more assertive in its attempts to have the chassis pivoting sideways, before letting the driver carry yaw forward with the throttle. A gimmick? Sure, but entertaining on gravel.

With the Conti having adopted a plug-in hybrid system, the pure-combustion powertrain in this Bentayga feels like an anachronism, although in the best way possible.

The Akrapovic exhaust is a touch overbearing for this sort of application, but there's no doubt that the V8 – entirely unaided by synthetic elements within the cabin – sounds fantastic when piped through it, and the transmission calibration is also excellent. As is throttle response, despite the fact that the Speed-spec V8 uses bigger turbochargers and higher boost levels than the regular unit. Roll-on acceleration is dreamily easy.

The brakes, too, offer more consistency and feedback than they do in a PHEV Conti, which of course now has to blend in a regenerative effect before physical pad-on-disc braking takes over.

Add in steering that has surprising life to it, with a motion that invites you to guide the Speed gently and precisely, and the result is a 2466kg super-luxury SUV that's genuinely satisfying to drive.

Rear-wheel steering, seen for the first time on the Speed, also gives a useful bit of added manoeuvrability.

So the Speed is good. Better than good, in many ways, although I do fear for the ride quality on British roads with the 23in wheels. On the American roads of the launch event, the body's long-wave movements were spectacularly measured and cushioned, as you would expect, but the chassis did transmit the impacts of expansion joints and the like just a touch too readily, in a way one imagines a regular Bentayga wearing 21in wheels wouldn't.

With its sumptuous cabin, the Speed is otherwise that rare thing: an overbearing, overpowered, over-the-top SUV that's not just very capable but likeable too.

RICHARD LANE

TECH SPEC

BENTLEY BENTAYGA SPEED

Speed-specific additions are far from necessary but do add up to something special

Price £219,000
Engine V8, 3996cc, twin-turbo, petrol
Power 641bhp at 6000rpm
Torque 627lb ft at 2250-4500rpm
Gearbox 8-spd automatic, 4WD
Kerb weight 2466kg
0-62mph 3.4sec
Top speed 193mph
Economy na
CO_2, tax band na
Rivals Aston Martin DBX 707 S, Range Rover Sport SV, Lamborghini Urus SE

■ Bentayga road trip to France, p58

TESTER'S NOTE

Bentaygas account for nearly half of Bentley's sales, and that's not surprising. Frankly, the dynamics of this Speed aren't far off those of the Conti GT, and then you have all the additional space and ride height. It's a car of monumental breadth. **RL**

TESTED 10.6.25, PRAGUE, CZECH REPUBLIC **DELIVERIES** JULY

SKODA ELROQ vRS

Small crossover sportified with retuned chassis, 335bhp from two motors

Adaptive dampers mean you don't have to put up with a thumping ride

Alcantara upholstery is the clearest way to tell this is the sporty one

Despite being a part of the Volkswagen cookie-cutter machine, Skoda has shown itself to be quite adept at doing things slightly differently – not radically so but in ways that do make an impact.

With cars like the Superb and Kodiaq, it espouses a 'more buttons, less nonsense' philosophy that we can get behind. With the Elroq, you might expect it to have made an ID 3 with an ice scraper in the charging flap, but it's actually more like a shortened Enyaq, and that extends to the new sporty version.

While the ID 3 GTX and Cupra Born VZ stick with a single rear motor, the Elroq vRS uses the same 335bhp dual-motor powertrain as the Enyaq vRS. But because it's a bit smaller and lighter, it's also quicker. That also means the sensible Skoda is faster than the sporty Cupra. They're clearly not wedded to hierarchy in Mladá Boleslav.

With all that said, the package is pretty familiar from the Enyaq vRS. You know the drill: MEB platform, big battery (79kWh usable), two motors, slightly but not excessively sportier tuning for a MacPherson-strut front and a multi-link rear.

Naturally there are also some more aggressive bumpers and unique wheels to set this vRS apart from the regular Elroq. The alloys are either 20in or 21in, and although I'm usually a fan of smaller wheels, in this case the smaller option looks purposely designed to make you want to upgrade; they look like spacesavers.

The vRS formula extends inside, where this is generally just a highly specified Elroq with sports seats in Alcantara, carbonfibre trim and, if specced right, some nuclear green accents to liven things up.

What's common to most vRS cars I've driven, whether powered by combustion or electrons, is that you can potter around and not really notice you're in the sporty one.

In this latest one, the seats are outstandingly comfortable, and it's not much noisier at a cruise than a regular Elroq. Adaptive dampers are standard and, at the softer end of the 15-point adjustment scale, the ride is properly wafty – to the point of floatiness in the most relaxed setting. Even the energy efficiency, often an issue on hot dual-motor EVs, is fine. I got 3.4mpkWh on a spirited route that included some 80mph motorway, so a range of 270 miles should be realistic, and it can be DC rapid-charged at 185kW.

It never truly entertains, though. That 335bhp output makes it nicely quick without ever blowing your mind, and accelerator response is fairly calm.

I do wish the regen wouldn't keep resetting to its adaptive mode and, as on all MEB cars, the brake pedal is mushy and inconsistent.

The variable-ratio steering is quite numb, and although the rear motor is more powerful than the front one, it doesn't really engage in tail-out antics – the staggered tyre sizing and conservative stability control see to that. Neutral balance is as good as it gets.

Apart from the Born and to a lesser extent the MG 4 EV, this class still lacks a driver's car. It needs its Hyundai Ioniq 5 N or Alpine A290 moment, and the Elroq vRS isn't it. What it is is a practical electric crossover with four-wheel drive and a bit of punch that doesn't beat you up for the pleasure.

You can make up your own mind on whether that makes it genius or non-committally redundant.

ILLYA VERPRAET

TECH SPEC

SKODA ELROQ vRS

Not exactly an electric driver's car but brisk, composed and comfortable, with a long range

Price £46,560
Engine Asynchronous motor (f), permanent magnet synchronous motor (r)
Power 335bhp
Torque 402lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, 4WD
Kerb weight 2154kg
0-62mph 5.4sec
Top speed 112mph
Battery 84/79kWh (total/usable)
Range, economy 336 miles, 3.8mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Cupra Born VZ, Mini Countryman SE All4, Volvo EX30 Twin Motor

TESTER'S NOTE

I do wish Skoda had put a bit more effort into the Elroq's design, which is just an Enyaq minus the rear overhang. It puts me in mind of those 'bob-tailed' Land Rover Discovery 2s you sometimes see tearing about the countryside. **IV**

TESTER'S NOTE Because the front end of the Q6 Sportback is identical to that of the regular Q6 SUV, it retains a usefully sized 64-litre frunk. **JA**

TESTED 5.6.25, INGOLSTADT, GERMANY **DELIVERIES** NOW

AUDI Q6 E-TRON SPORTBACK

Technical showcase of an electric SUV now offers a sleeker bodystyle too

Other than enraging lexicological pedants and boosting car makers' coffers, what's the point of SUV-coupés? They generally cost a bit more than their conventional SUV siblings yet offer slightly less practicality. Well, perhaps in the electric age, when aerodynamics play a key role in maximising range, this type of car deserves a place.

Take the new Q6 E-tron Sportback (or should that be the Q6 Sportback E-tron?), the sloping-roofed version of Audi's all-new electric SUV. The Q6 siblings are essentially identical in their main body but their rooflines diverge from their A-pillars onwards. The Sportback's more sculpted bodywork makes it slightly more aerodynamic than the regular Q6 (their drag coefficients are 0.26 and 0.28), and that in turn increases its range by a few miles.

The longest-legged Q6 model is the Sportback Performance, which mates a single 302bhp rear-mounted motor to a 94.9kWh (usable) battery.

Pick entry-level Sport trim with 19in wheels and in SUV form you will get a range of 391 miles. Pay the extra £2500 for the equivalent Sportback and that will increase to 406 miles. It's a marginal gain at best, but for some buyers clearing the 400-mile barrier will make that extra worth it (even if they will get more like 350 miles in reality).

There is also a reduction in rear head room – although it's still plenty spacious for most adults back there – and a boot that, at 511 litres, is 15 litres smaller but still big enough for most people's needs.

From behind the wheel, little but the view out the rear window and your remaining-range indicator separates the Sportback from the regular Q6. My top-spec Edition 1 test car's dashboard was slightly overwhelmed by screens and shiny surfaces, with fewer buttons than I would like, but the infotainment is generally well laid out, even if it's a bit more anodyne and bland than in previous generations of Audi.

It feels much the same to drive as well. My test car sat on 21in wheels but still rode really well, thanks to its adaptive air suspension, and while the steering doesn't have the feel you would want from an Audi, it has reasonable turn-in and poise.

This is our first taste of a single-motor Q6 and, as is often the case with EVs, it transpires that it still has more than enough performance for everyday motoring.

You're unlikely to use the launch control often, but if you do you will believe the claimed 0-62mph time of 6.6sec. This car's performance is generally effortless, belying its size – although you're less likely to forget that on small roads.

I also sampled the Sportback in 382bhp dual-motor Quattro form, and this back-to-back test did make me question if anyone would need the extra motor.

As with the regular Q6, you can make a good objective case for the Q6 Sportback: it has a long range, a comfortable ride, plenty of kit and a layer of Audi's premium sheen.

But if you're looking for an electric SUV with more soul, adding a sloping roof and a few extra miles won't make much of a difference.

JAMES ATTWOOD

Edition 1 trim adds 10.9in touchscreen for front passenger

Test car's ride was great, but UK-market Q6s miss out on air suspension

TECH SPEC

AUDI Q6 E-TRON SPORTBACK PERFORMANCE EDITION 1

Coupé body does little to boost Q6's appeal – but this car does prove you don't need the extra motor

Price £73,950
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 302bhp
Torque 358lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, RWD
Kerb weight 2200kg
0-62mph 6.6sec
Top speed 130mph
Battery 100/94.9kWh (total/usable, est)
Range, economy 375 miles, 3.4mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Mercedes-Benz EQE SUV, Polestar 3

TESTED 26.3.25, YOKOHAMA, JAPAN **DELIVERIES** EARLY 2026

NISSAN LEAF

Original mainstream EV transforms into a family crossover for third era

The new Nissan Leaf feels like a bit of a milestone moment: it's the first mainstream mass-market electric vehicle to reach a third generation. Although that really depends on how you define such things: to all intents and purposes, the new Leaf is an entirely new model. The only thing it has in common with its pioneering predecessors is a name.

The original Leaf arrived in 2010 as a mid-sized five-door hatchback with a Chademo charging port, a 24kWh battery, a 124-mile range, a price tag of £23,350 after a government grant and a whole load of novelty about whether a car powered by batteries could actually find mainstream buyers.

The Mk2 Leaf followed in 2018, eventually featuring a 60kWh battery that gave it a range of up to 239 miles and priced from £21,990 (again, after a government grant).

Fifteen years after being launched and the Leaf is as unrecognisable compared with its predecessors as the concept of a government grant is to UK EV buyers. For this third generation it has grown substantially and is now firmly a crossover – albeit a very sleek one – rather than a hatchback. That shift in size helps make way for the new Renault-built Nissan Micra (driven, p32) but is also designed to position the new Leaf as the primary car of a household.

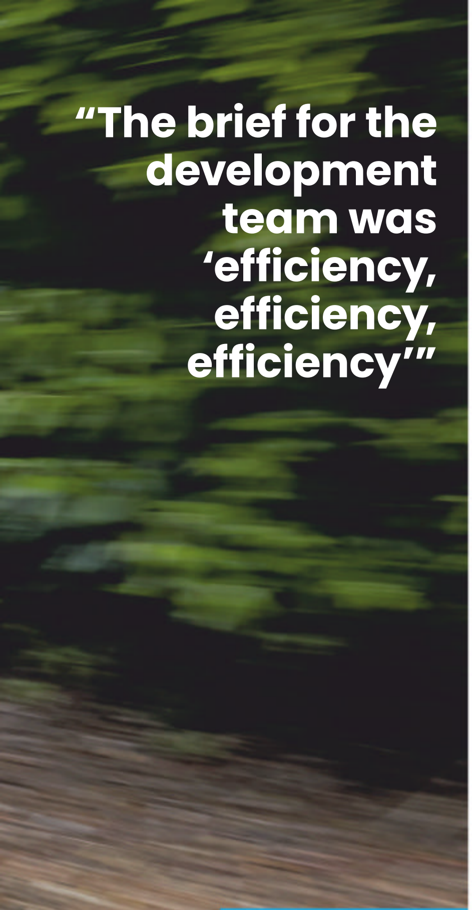
The Leaf now sits on the same CMF-EV platform as the larger Ariya EV and has a strong family resemblance to that model: it's determinedly less frumpy than the Leafs of old.

That's in part because of the brief the development team was set, described by chief vehicle engineer Hiroki Isobe as: "Efficiency, efficiency, efficiency."

Plenty of sleek aerodynamic elements help the new body to achieve a drag coefficient of 0.25 (the Mk2 Leaf's was 0.28) and thereby maximise range, and there's now a bespoke heat pump for the heating system.

With the biggest 75kWh (usable capacity) battery pack fitted, the Leaf has an official range of 375 miles. But the main focus has been on offering real-world range at

Comfort-focused character remains; it's laudably refined



“The brief for the development team was ‘efficiency, efficiency, efficiency’”

Seating position has been raised in line with new crossover styling

Power hasn’t been increased but range is now up to 375 miles

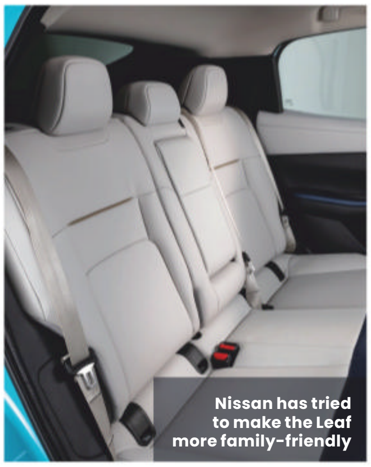
TESTER’S NOTE

As James says, I’ve had a brief go in the Leaf, too. It feels like a step change from its predecessor and has far more mass-market appeal. It’s hard to define what it’s ‘thing’ is at this stage, but perhaps it’s that motorway efficiency the engineers are talking up. A promising start. **MT**

speed, and indeed Nissan claims it can cover more than 200 miles at an 80mph cruise.

When you do reach your destination, it will charge at up to 150kW via – gasp! – a CCS plug. At which time, can we all please spare a moment to remember Chademo, forever to be remembered as the Betamax of EV charging?

Any judgement on that will have to wait, though, because so far our running in the Leaf has been far more limited. I sampled a prototype version under a long embargo at Nissan’s Grandrive test track in Yokohama, Japan, then last week editor Mark Tisshaw tackled the Hill Route at Millbrook Proving Ground in one. Both tracks gave hints at the new Leaf’s dynamic prowess but little more.



Nissan has tried to make the Leaf more family-friendly

Mechanically, the Leaf has a new ‘three-in-one’ electric motor (meaning it combines the inverter, motor and reducer into a single package) that sends up to 214bhp and 261lb ft of torque to the front wheels. There’s MacPherson-strut suspension up front and a multi-link arrangement at the rear, while wheel sizes range from 18in to 19in.

Nissan says the Leaf has been set up for a comfortable ride in order to better fit its family car brief. And even on a short drive, what’s instantly apparent is the refinement: it’s really quiet and calm, with strong noise isolation.

The power delivery feels linear and smooth as well: it’s not an EV for showing off with dramatic acceleration, but it has strong pick-up, as you would expect.

The Mk2 Leaf’s one-pedal mode returns, plus there’s now adjustable brake regen controlled by paddles on the steering wheel. They work well, but I suspect most drivers will end up using the one-pedal mode most of the time.

When it comes to dynamics, the new Leaf is fairly typical among crossovers of this size: our initial experiences have revealed no real foibles or annoyances that would put you off, but those searching for pure driver engagement will be left wanting.

Still, the steering is well weighted and it’s a very relaxing car to drive.

It’s also a pleasant place to sit: the dashboard’s twin digital screens are crisp and clear and there are useful physical buttons for key functions, although we didn’t have enough time to really find out how well either worked. The layout is a little more traditional than the Ariya’s, but in terms of practicality that’s not a bad thing at all.

Back in 2010, there were no rivals for it if you were looking for something electric, but today the electric crossover market is incredibly crowded. Nissan will be relieved, then, that these early drives suggest the reinvented Leaf should find itself near the sharp end.

JAMES ATTWOOD

TECH SPEC

NISSAN LEAF

Reinvented EV pioneer has the credentials to be a strong contender in a crowded class

Price £32,000 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 214bhp
Torque 261lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight na
0-62mph na
Top speed na
Battery 75kWh (usable)
Range, economy 375 miles, 5.0mpkWh (est)
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Kia EV3, MG S5 EV, Skoda Elroq

TESTED 10.6.25, BEDFORDSHIRE **DELIVERIES** EARLY 2026

NISSAN MICRA

Can the magic of the Renault 5 also help spark a renaissance at Nissan?

It's fun to drive without being overtly sporty

Interior is a toned-down copy of the 5's

By the time a car enters its sixth generation, you can normally be fairly certain what its replacement is going to be like. After all, longevity in this industry is often a byword for success.

Yet like the five Nissan Micras before it, this new sixth-gen model is very different again. It has gone electric and is a twin to the Renault 5, with little to no mechanical changes from what is admittedly a very good starting point, given it's Car of the Year and all the rage among the buying public.

It has been given an extensive reskin by Nissan's London design team, however, and if the Mk6 draws on any of its predecessors for inspiration, then it's the Mk3 – the funky bubble version that probably marked the high point for the Micra before it really lost its way in the 2010s. Those round front lights are the most obvious visual link.

Given the 5 isn't just the rebirth of Renault's supermini icon but also a poster child for the renaissance of the company itself, Nissan's designers have on the face of it been backed into a corner in trying to claim the Micra as its own. Yet they have done a good job.

The front and rear redesigns are substantial enough not to have you confused between Nissan and Renault and the clever use of dark cladding at the bottom of the car helps change the proportions slightly, making it seem taller.

It's only really when you look at the profiles of the two cars that the similarities leap out, the 5's distinctive C-pillar design being a particular giveaway.

There are fewer places inside the car to hide the fact the Micra is a 5 underneath. Trim aside, the layouts are effectively one and the same. Yet Nissan has used trim effectively to create a different feel and aesthetic for the Micra's interior.

If the two cars do diverge slightly in their designs, they don't beneath the skin. Like the 5, the Micra is powered by a front-mounted electric motor with 121bhp or 148bhp. The former is associated with the smaller 40kWh battery option (which gives a 192-mile range) and the latter with the 52kWh battery (a 253-mile range).

The platform on which the two cars are based is called Ampr Small, and chassis development for the Micra was left to Renault. The Micra hasn't been given its own chassis tune, then, so while this car tries to look like a Nissan, it doesn't try to drive like one.

My drive was limited to two runs of the Hill Route at Millbrook Proving Ground, which for testing a car is actually quite a productive use of 10 minutes. It would be good fun in a 5, and so it is in a Micra.

While Nissan's engineers can't take credit for the way the Micra has been set up, they certainly shouldn't be disappointed by what has come back from their French colleagues.

The Micra is nippy and grippy, with a good amount of torque low down, and is a car that's more about agility and having fun at everyday speeds than trying to mimic a hot hatch (there's the Alpine A290 for that). It handles bumps in the road well and it turns in to corners nicely.

Given how good the 5 is, is it any surprise to find on these very early impressions that the Micra is quite a good car itself?

It creates quite an odd situation, though, in truth. The 5 is such a fabulous design and such a bold statement that it feels a bit grubby to be showering Nissan with praise for putting a new skin on it. It's a bit like when John Terry put his full Chelsea kit on to lift the Champions League trophy despite not having played in the final.

MARK TISSHAW

TECH SPEC

NISSAN MICRA 52KWH

Drives like the Renault 5, which is no bad thing at all, and even better if you like Nissans

Price £23,500 (est)
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 148bhp
Torque 181lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1542kg
0-62mph 8.0sec
Top speed 93mph
Battery 52kWh (usable)
Range, economy 253 miles, 4.8mpkWh (est)
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Mini Cooper E, Peugeot e-208

TESTER'S NOTE

The brake pedal can take some adjusting to if you've driven other small EVs, as it's stiffer and actually feels quite responsive. To that end, brake feel and response are as good as it gets so far from a mainstream EV. **MT**

NISSAN
MICRA

UK VERDICTS

TESTED 11.6.25, LONDON **DELIVERIES** NOW

BYD DOLPHIN SURF

TESTER'S NOTE

All trim levels get 'vegan leather' seats. A triumph of marketing, that term. It's not leather and it's not as nice as cloth. **MP**

Cheap yet fully equipped Dacia Spring rival arrives with 154bhp, 193 miles

The BYD Dolphin Surf – aka the Seagull in its home market of China because that's what its face looks like – is now in the UK.

To suggest that BYD is ambitious would be an understatement. It used to say it was the biggest company you had never heard of. Now you have, and in the past couple of months it has taken a 2% market share in the UK. It has sold more than half a million Seagulls already abroad and will be building Surfs in Hungary before the year is out.

Europe is getting this car later than some markets because our expectations are higher than some others'. BYD has made exterior and interior treatments and suspension tweaks specifically for us. The Surf is even a bit longer, but at 3.99m it remains a small hatchback – one of the most popular market segments but the least electrified. It's electric and priced to compete with the cheaper EVs, from £18,650.

That gets you the Active model, with an 87bhp motor, a 30kWh battery and a range of 137 miles. At £21,950 comes the Boost (likely to be the biggest seller) with a 43.2kWh battery but the same motor and a 200-mile range. Then there's a Comfort at £23,950, with the bigger battery and a 154bhp motor.

The Comfort's range is officially 193 miles and even less in reality, but it's reasonably brisk, with a 9.1sec 0-62mph time and, being an EV, particularly swift from rest.

For a car of its length, the Surf is accommodating. I could easily 'sit behind myself' with head and leg room to spare (I'm 5ft 10in) and there's a 308-litre boot, including a deep underfloor cubby.

Quality is really good at this price. Given that it has the same materials, even the base version will feel more grown-up than the Dacia Spring. Pricier versions will get a harder time from the Renault 5, though.

Equipment levels are good in all trim levels. One could argue that Chinese companies have a price advantage baked in, but customers' qualms are quickly soothed by the idea of a sub-£24k car with heated, electrically adjustable seats and automatic wipers and lights.

There are some weird control elements: some of the ADAS are intrusive (the driver attention monitoring seemingly can't be switched off) and the temperature setting is labelled 'L' or 'H' with a numeral, rather than with an actual temperature in degrees, which is baffling. You can drag three fingers on the touchscreen to easily change the fan speed or temperature, mind.

My test route took me from north London up into Hertfordshire and back, so a good mix of town, dual-carriageway and country road driving. And when it comes to things that you and I will care about, the driving experience is still behind the best.

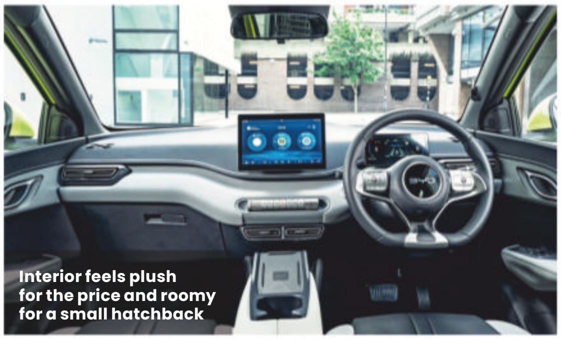
Around town the ride absorbency is fine, visibility is too, and the turning circle good. But on the open road there's some heave to it, the steering has a curious stickiness and brake pedal feel is mushily, non-linearly progressive.

That you're reading Autocar implies that this stuff matters to you. Me too. But the Surf's pricing, interior feel and equipment levels will move it near the top of plenty of people's shortlists.

BYD likes a maritime name. And the coming of the company feels as unstoppable as a rising tide.

MATT PRIOR

Never leave town and you will never have any complaints



Interior feels plush for the price and roomy for a small hatchback

TECH SPEC

BYD DOLPHIN SURF COMFORT

Won't satisfy enthusiasts but its pricing will be more than good enough for the target audience

★★★⯪☆

Price £23,950
Engine Permanent magnet synchronous motor
Power 154bhp
Torque 229lb ft
Gearbox 1-spd reduction gear, FWD
Kerb weight 1390kg
0-62mph 9.1sec
Top speed 93mph
Battery 43.2kWh (usable)
Range, economy 193 miles, 4.5mpkWh
CO_2, tax band 0g/km, 3%
Rivals Fiat 500e, Hyundai Inster, Renault 5

ROAD TEST

AUTOCAR **ROAD TEST 5755**

CUPRA TERRAMAR

Cupra injects some Latin flair into the bloated family SUV class

MODEL TESTED
CUPRA TERRAMAR 2.0 TSI 4DRIVE VZ2
Price £49,395
Power 261bhp at 5000-6500rpm
Torque 295lb ft at 1650-4350rpm
0-60mph 5.6sec
30-70mph 5.1sec
Top speed 151mph (claimed)
Average economy 28.7mpg
Touring economy 35.0mpg
CO_2 emissions 193g/km
70-0mph 44.4m (16deg C, dry)

The market, arguably, is not in need of another C-segment SUV. We already have the Volkswagen Tiguan, Kia Sportage, Ford Kuga, Nissan Qashqai, Volvo XC40, BMW X1, Skoda Karoq, Audi Q3, Toyota RAV4, Jeep Compass, Renault Arkana, Mercedes GLA, Citroën C5 Aircross, MG HS, Hyundai Tucson, Peugeot 3008 and several others besides. But this glut of competition hasn't deterred Cupra, which is already represented by the Tiguan-adjacent Ateca, and has now launched the Terramar for a two-pronged attack.

This appears to be overkill but there are good reasons why the Terramar exists. Back in 2018, when Cupra was repositioned as a stand-alone entity rather than a performance sub-brand of Seat, the Ateca was the first model it launched. In the seven years since, Cupra has evolved in terms of design both inside and out, its digital array, the powertrains and, to some extent, the dynamic identity of the cars. In short, the Ateca no longer feels particularly 'Cupra', while the Terramar does.

So what exactly do we have here? In effect, the Terramar is Cupra's flagship, although you could say it occupies this position jointly with the all-electric Tavascan, which is similarly sized but has a sharper look to it at the front and a sloping roof where the Terramar has traditional, SUV-style C-pillars. You can't yet have the Terramar in pure-electric form, although we already know that this will change for the second generation, when the model will move upmarket as it shuffles onto the same platform that underpins the Porsche Macan Electric and Audi Q6 E-tron. For now, the Mk1 Terramar is the last new Cupra product fitted with an internal combustion engine.

Whether you opt for an engine alone or pair it with an electric motor is up to you, and there is the choice of front- and four-wheel drive as well, plus a couple of suspension options. It's typical VW Group fare, although we have come to like how Cupra sets its cars up in terms of steering, ride and handling, and there's potential for the Terramar to be something of a driver's choice in this chock-full class. That wasn't quite the case with the eHybrid 272 we have previously tried, but here we test a four-wheel-drive version of the Terramar, with essentially a detuned VW Golf R engine and some usefully versatile dampers.

Modern Cupra has left the Ateca behind

DESIGN & ENGINEERING

★★★½☆

PROS Striking looks by staid class standards; broad powertrain range
CONS Range-topper could be more powerful; no diesel option, sadly

It's worth defining the Terramar in relation to its Cupra range-mates, because the hierarchy is not obvious. In length and width, the new car slots in between the cheaper, lower-slung Formentor and the electric Tavascan, although it is also the widest of the three. The differences are minimal, however, and each of these cars has a similar footprint, with the Formentor and Terramar even having the same wheelbase (the Tavascan's is a touch longer on account of its EV-specific mechanical packaging).

Built in Audi's Gyor plant in Hungary, the Terramar uses the latest iteration of the MQB Evo platform, which means it's powered by a range of familiar powertrains.

There are three options that don't need plugging in: a 1.5-litre mild-hybrid four-cylinder petrol with 148bhp driving the front wheels and a four-wheel-drive 2.0-litre with either 201bhp or 261bhp.

Then there's a 1.5-litre plug-in hybrid with either 201bhp or 268bhp. Both options use the same generous, 19.7kWh (usable) battery as the latest VW Golf, VW Tiguan and Skoda Superb, and so are rated for more than 70 miles on a charge.

For the 261bhp 2.0-litre TSI car we have here, four-wheel drive comes in the familiar form of a Haldex-sourced, hydraulically controlled multi-plate clutch that engages the rear axle when required. It allows the Terramar to split available torque equally between the axles, with the precise amount dictated by data relating to steering angle, wheel slip and of course any yaw the chassis might be experiencing. What the Terramar doesn't get, at any trim level, is the dual-clutch-pack, torque-splitting rear axle first seen on the Mk8 Golf R. This can direct all of the available rear-axle torque (that is, up to half of what the engine is generating at a given moment) to one side of the car. Only the Formentor and the Leon estate are available with this hardware, as well as the EA888 engine in full, 329bhp Golf R-matching output.

As for suspension, in comparable spec, the Terramar's body sits 10mm lower than the Tiguan, both cars being underpinned by the MQB Evo platform, and from VZ1 grade up the Cupra is fitted with the twin-valve dampers that form the basis of the highly variable Dynamic Chassis Control (DCC). The Terramar also introduces a new-for-Cupra front suspension upright that dials in greater camber, as well as a new control arm for keener initial steering response. On this 2.0 TSI version, and also the 268bhp eHybrid, you can option six-piston front brakes from Akebono (made famous by the McLaren P1), which ups the discs' diameter from 340mm to 375mm. Our example doesn't have them, and we will see just how well the standard units bring the car's as-tested weight of 1737kg (1675kg claimed) to heel. In any event, Cupra doesn't skimp on rubber for its more potent Terramar, at least in VZ2 trim – this car is fitted with Continental's excellent SportContact 6 tyres.

The entry-level V1 Terramar wears 18in alloys with a good amount of tyre sidewall. By the time you get to VZ2 trim, as tested here, the Terramar has concept car-esque, 20in 'Hadron' alloys and a more performance-oriented rubber compound to boot.

The Terramar sports some rather impressive lighting hardware, which has become a calling card for Cupra. The three-triangle signature for the headlights is one thing, but the multi-layered element in the tail-lights is even more striking, and standard across the range.

INTERIOR

★★★★☆

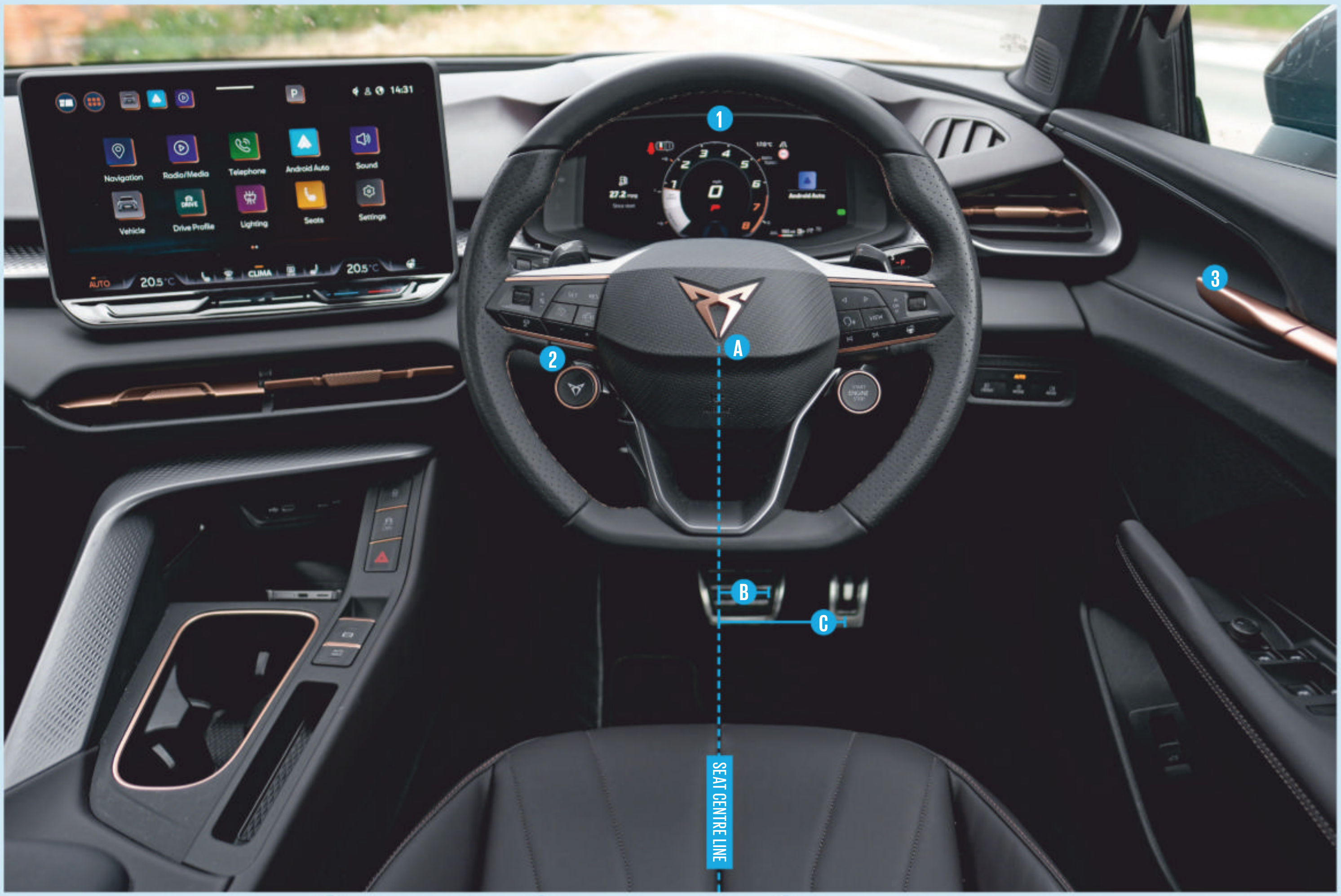
PROS Lavish compared with rivals; rear bench and boot are versatile
CONS Limited carrying capacity in hybrids; lack of physical switchgear

Cupra's recent wares have perhaps the most distinctive interiors of all the VW Group coterie, majoring on unusual colours and plush materials (Audi has gone all in on piano black plastics while Skoda and VW itself are solidly unmemorable). Our VZ2-grade car's burgundy upholstery, fluid stitching patterns and copper details were a bit louche for some testers but you can't say Cupra isn't making an effort. The cockpit is also fairly driver-oriented and has some interesting technical textiles made from recycled plastics. It ▸

① Cupra's digital instrument binnacle is more traditional – and clear and engaging – than many. You can put the rev counter front and centre or include a speedometer roundel too.

② 'Cupra' button allows for quick switching between the car's drive modes, with a long press activating Cupra mode itself, which essentially bestrides Sport and Race modes.

③ Copper-coloured elements are integral to Cupra's colour palette but they feel chintzy here, and perhaps undermine the atmosphere of what can be rather a rewarding driver's car.



WHEEL AND PEDAL ALIGNMENT Ⓐ Steering offset 0mm Ⓑ Brake offset 50mm right Ⓒ Accelerator offset 180mm right. Volkswagen's MQB Evo platform tends to generate a neatly aligned driving position and that's the case again here. Some drivers will want to set the seat lower, mind.

◂ feels inviting and high quality, and gives you a reasonably low driving position for something that is, after all, supposed to be an SUV. The sports seats are also nicely supportive, with plenty of adjustment, and there's a decent amount of storage. It all combines to make the Terramar feel like the urbane 'GT' of the C-SUV class.

As has become the norm, nearly everything is controlled through the centre screen, which has had a significant update compared with previous generations of Cupras but still has room for improvement.

The dreaded touch bar remains and looks a bit cheap compared with the rest of the interior but the main screen interface is fairly logical. A bar at the bottom gives you instant access to the climate controls and heated seats, and a permanent bar at the top lets you choose up to three shortcuts. Swiping down reveals even more customisable shortcuts. Some of the menus are too complex, but most frequently used functions are easily accessible, including the ADAS controls, which can also be usefully accessed via the spoke of the firm, contoured steering wheel. Here you'll also find the switchgear for the car's 'predictive' adaptive cruise control and lane keeping program.

Ergonomically, the Terramar does nothing to change the game, but it does have a trick up its sleeve. The rear seats slide 150mm fore and aft, as well as reclining and folding in a 40/20/40 pattern. It means you can achieve a competitive amount of leg room, or up to 642 litres of boot capacity if you also set the split-level floor to it lowest position and slide the seats forward. That's within spitting distance of the larger, less athletic Tiguan. The PHEV models aren't so capacious, mind. With the battery to house, there's no extra underfloor storage, meaning you're limited to 400 litres.

PERFORMANCE

★★★⯪☆

PROS Smooth, predictable, easy powertrain; quicker than suggested
CONS Rivals have more power and are quicker still; divisive engine note

This more powerful 2.0-litre TSI Terramar is comfortably the most convincing version of the car we have yet tested. The characteristics of the EA888 engine are as they ever were, with accessible, consistent torque delivery being prioritised over much in the way of 'shape' in the delivery, but it is done to impressive effect. Our test car, helped by a launch control function, surged to 60mph in 5.6sec and 62mph in 5.8sec, beating the manufacturer's 5.9sec claim. Had Cupra been generous enough to fit the Terramar with the 329bhp version of the powertrain found in the Formentor and Leon ST, we would expect those figures to be a second or so quicker, but even so, this is not a sluggish car, particularly by class standards, and it has prodigiously easy drivability. With four-wheel drive and good rubber, straight-line traction is also never an issue, even in the damp.

The Terramar's performance is aided by a capable dual-clutch automatic gearbox that goes about its business without fanfare. This extends to the shift paddles, which are somewhat uneventful to pull in light of the flamboyance of Cupra's approach to cabin design elsewhere. But perhaps that's not worth crying over, because although you can initiate a manual mode, the car's brain never seems to give you full control, and will always upshift at the 6500rpm redline besides.

Given the strait-laced effectiveness of the engine itself, perhaps the most memorable element of the Terramar's performance is the synthetic engine and exhaust notes piped into the cabin. This feels more forgivable in a slightly frivolous, pseudo-sporty crossover than it does in a serious performance car like, say, a BMW M5, and the Terramar's made-up sonic output is, in truth, among the rortiest and silliest around. Yet pushing the mode-select button that hangs off the steering wheel and engaging Cupra mode (available on VZ models only) does up the fun factor and lends some engagement to the car's lightly boosty throttle response and uniform delivery.

Ultimately, although the hottest Terramar is down on spec-sheet power compared with rivals from BMW, Mercedes-AMG and Mini, on the road it feels plenty quick enough and decently good fun.

HANDLING & STABILITY

★★★★☆

PROS Tidy steering and a neat balance; wears 4WD lightly
CONS Rear torque splitter would equal more fun; hybrids are dull

In our experience, the front-drive, hybrid-powered Terramar isn't the most enlivening device on a good B-road. The balance is one of mild understeer and there's an inertness to direction changes that you don't get so much with lower-riding models such as the Leon, or even the Formentor. Anybody weighing up the Terramar as a more spacious, more lavish upgrade from traditional hot hatch fare won't find a lot to get excited about here.

The pure-petrol 4Drive Terramar, especially when fitted with the more powerful engine and Cupra's version of the VW Group's DCC, is a different proposition. All Terramars have a gratifying weight and speed to their steering (by class standards, at least), and our test car carved into bends accurately before establishing an easy mid-corner balance, then driving out with lots of traction and an ability to keep its nose on your chosen line. This car wears its driven rear axle lightly: it only really manifests on the power rather than off it, which is how you would want it. Turn in on a trailing throttle and the Terramar won't rotate like a true hot hatch, but it gestures towards that kind of balance. The rear axle then supports the balance as you exit, although the oversteer antics permitted by the famous torque splitter are of course absent.

There is therefore little point in wringing the Terramar's neck, but that's fine because the car works best at a committed canter. Much of this is due to the DCC, which can seem overwhelming at first, with its multitude of damper settings, but does allow you to set the Terramar up very nicely for British country roads. Light steering, the most responsive engine mode and damping response just a touch softer than the default mode (so closer to Comfort than Cupra) lets the car flow in a controlled manner, giving you a communicative level of weight transfer but with reassuring resistance to roll and pitch. In this way, you can make fast, satisfying, surprisingly comfortable progress in any conditions, which is surely what a car like this is all about.

COMFORT & STABILITY

★★★★☆

PROS DCC dampers are genuinely useful; good ergonomics; quiet
CONS Secondary ride not always brilliant on the 20in wheels

We have touched on stability, which is generally excellent, the car responding predictably even if you go out of your way to unsettle it on a circuit (only in VZ cars can the ESC be turned off entirely).

The Terramar's fundamental level of comfort is also high. Outright visibility isn't as good as it is in many rivals (Cupra has aimed to instil that cosseted feel with a high scuttle and beltlines). However, the ergonomics are fine for long-distance work and, by slackening the dampers to just a notch or two below the standard Comfort setting on the DCC menu, you can earn yourself a cushy, flowing ride quality that feels in keeping with the car's near-£50,000 positioning. On its 20in wheels, our VZ2 car's ability to deal with potholes and threadbare road surfaces wasn't quite as impressive but was still at an acceptable level given the performance-leaning remit. The Terramar is never conspicuously lacking in rolling refinement.

Part of that is down to noise. At 70mph our car recorded 66dBA, compared with 65dBA for the Audi Q5 TDI we tested recently, and exactly equal to the electric Skoda Elroq, riding on smaller wheels.

BUYING & OWNING

★★★★☆

PROS EV range of hybrids is great; priced appropriately; standard kit
CONS 2.0 TSI isn't the most frugal; Leon ST is more tempting to us

The Terramar range starts with the 1.5 eTSI mild hybrid in V1 trim at £37,885, which is similar to a VW Tiguan with the same engine, or a BMW X1 sDrive20i. The entry-level hybrid with 201bhp is then priced from £44,165, which is slightly more than the BMW X1 xDrive25e, though the Cupra is better equipped and has a much longer electric range. It's rated for 76 miles, which is impressive. The more powerful hybrid is about £2500 more and is simply not worth the extra outlay.

The 261bhp high-performance petrol tested here is priced from £46,745, which is a good bit cheaper than the X1 M35i and Mercedes-AMG GLA 35, but then those are also more powerful. Meanwhile, the Mini Countryman John Cooper Works, which shares its mechanicals with the BMW, is slightly cheaper.

It means that, at £49,395, the VZ2 Terramar, which has the engine you would really want, slots in where you would expect, and comes well equipped. It's comparatively economical too. A touring economy of 35.0mpg compares well with the 37.6mpg of the Skoda Octavia vRS Estate we tested earlier this year (the same engine but considerably lighter and with a smaller frontal area). In everyday use you can expect to do even better, with our dedicated test returning 38.8mpg, for a range of 500 or so miles.

Our only real reservation concerns the 329bhp Leon ST's existence. It's priced almost exactly in line with the Terramar and offers almost as much space, but is the quicker, better-handling machine. ▸

FRONT Leg room 1080mm, head room 1060mm. Modular seats look smart but aren't quite as supportive as those aggressive bolsters suggest.

REAR Leg room 650mm, head room 930mm. Deep floor makes a nice change from EVs, while a cut-out in the front seatbacks boosts knee room.

BOOT Length 870-1660mm, width 1000mm, height 460-170mm. Unlike in hybrid models, you can lower the boot floor for even more capacity.

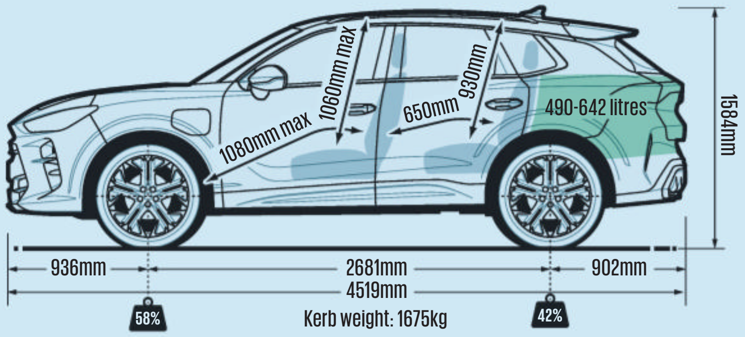
CUPRA
KY74 JXW

"You can make fast, comfortable progress in any conditions"

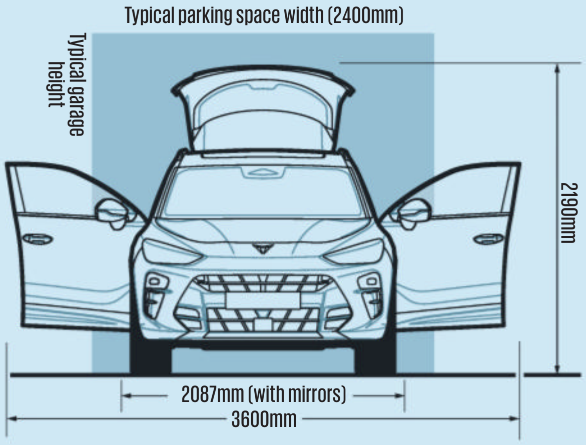
TEST RESULTS

DIMENSIONS

Length 4519mm **Width** 2087mm/1865mm (with/without mirrors) **Height** 1584mm **Door span** 3600mm **Max height to open boot** 2190mm

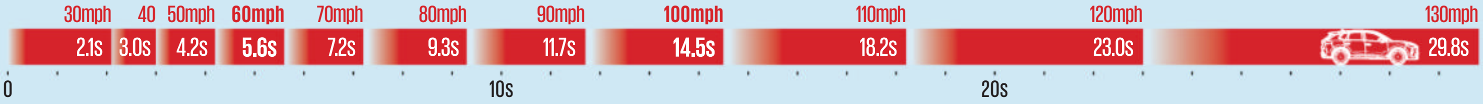

1080mm max
1060mm max
650mm
930mm
490-642 litres
1584mm
936mm
2681mm
902mm
4519mm
58%
42%
Kerb weight: 1675kg

PARKING

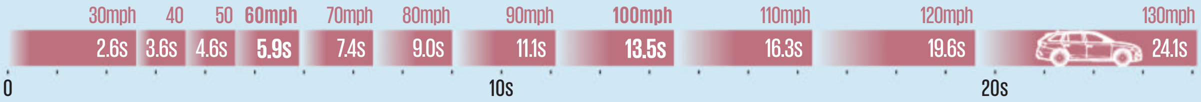

Typical parking space width (2400mm)
Typical garage height
2190mm
2087mm (with mirrors)
3600mm

ACCELERATION

Test conditions 16deg C, dry
Standing quarter mile 14.2sec at 99.1mph **Standing km** 26.0sec at 125.0mph **30-70mph** 5.1sec **30-70mph in fourth** 8.5sec **0-62mph** 5.8sec

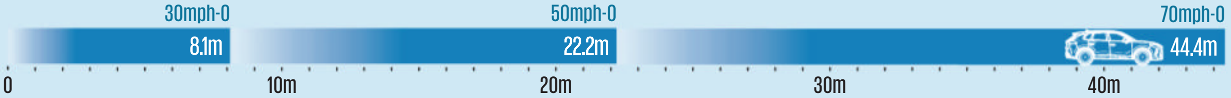


Skoda Octavia vRS Estate (2025, 1deg C, damp/drying)
Standing quarter mile 14.1sec at 102.7mph **Standing km** 25.4sec at 130.4mph **30-70mph** 4.8sec **30-70mph in fourth** 8.0sec

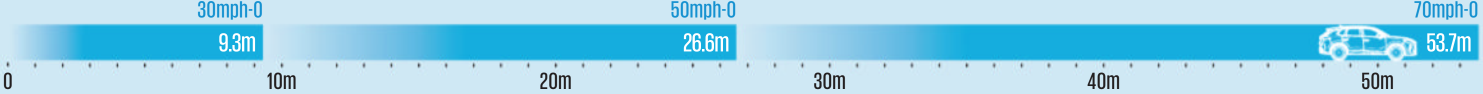


BRAKING

Dry 60-0mph 2.39sec



Wet 60-0mph 2.8sec

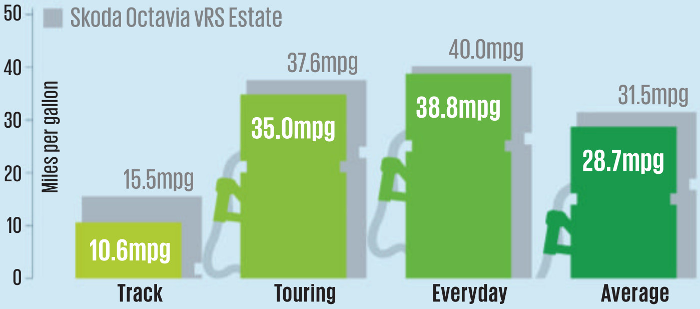


ACCELERATION IN GEAR

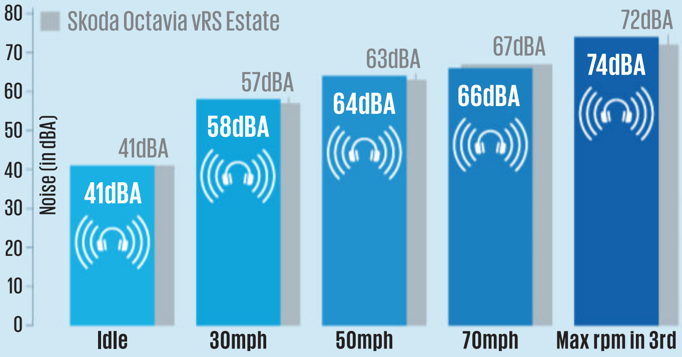
mph	Time (sec)					
	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
20-40	1.9	3.2				
30-50	2.1	2.8	4.3	6.7		
40-60		2.8	4.2	5.5	7.7	
50-70		3.1	4.3	5.9	7.3	9.8
60-80		3.6	4.4	6.1	8.0	9.9
70-90			4.6	6.4	8.7	11.0
80-100			5.3	6.9	9.5	12.5
90-110			6.5	7.7	10.6	15.0
100-120			7.9	9.0	12.3	
110-130				10.6		

RUNNING EFFICIENCY

WLTP 32.1-33.2mpg (combined) **Test range** 379/462/512 miles (average/touring/everyday)

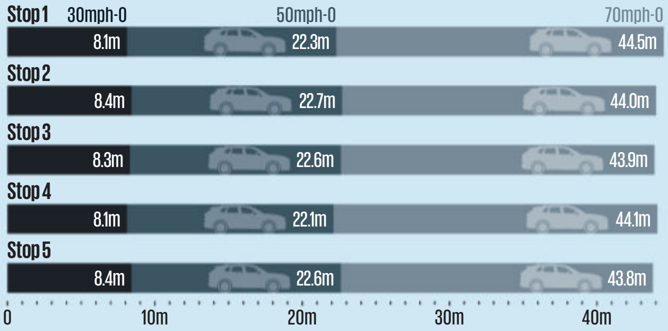


CABIN NOISE



BRAKING ENDURANCE

Fade variance 70-0m – stop 1 vs stop 5: -0.7m



PETER LIDDIARD

THE SMALL PRINT Power-to-weight and torque-to-weight figures are calculated using manufacturer's claimed kerb weight. Running efficiency is tested on a closed test track; 'touring' is representative of UK motorway driving, 'everyday' of intra-urban driving. Acceleration, braking and cabin noise are measured on reference surfaces, for cabin noise using a handheld decibel meter. Charging equipment may vary, but charger power always exceeds the advertised peak draw of the test car, unless stated. Second-row leg room is typical, measured behind a driver's seat set for 1000mm of leg room. © 2025, Haymarket Media Group Ltd. Test results may not be reproduced without editor's written permission.

MANUFACTURER'S SPECIFICATION

CUPRA TERRAMAR 2.0 TSI 4DRIVE VZ2

On-the-road price £49,395
Price as tested £50,380
Typical PCP £646 pcm (£7510 deposit + 35 months/30,000 miles)
Insurance group 33E

FITTED EQUIPMENT

Standard 10.3in digital cockpit, 'High Canyon' burgundy leather bucket seats with lumbar support, head-up display, three-zone climate control, heated multifunction steering wheel, Dynamic Chassis Control, electric tailgate, black roof rails
Optional Graphene Grey paint £985
Also available Akebono performance brakes £2035, panoramic sunroof £945, 'Immersive by Sennheiser' sound system £420

ENGINE

Installation Front, transverse, FWD
Type 4 cyls in line, 1984cc, turbocharged, petrol
Power 261bhp at 5000-6500rpm
Torque 295lb ft at 1650-4350rpm
Redline 6500rpm
Specific output 132bhp per litre
Power to weight 156bhp per tonne
Torque to weight 176lb ft per tonne

GEARBOX

Type 7-spd dual-clutch automatic

CHASSIS & BODY

Construction Steel monocoque
Weight/as tested 1675kg/1737kg
Weight distribution (f/r) 58%/42%
Drag coefficient na
Wheels 9.0Jx20in
Tyres 255/40 R20 101Y, Continental SportContact 6
Spare None (mobility foam)
Fuel tank 60 litres (under rear seats, filler on nearside rear wing)

SUSPENSION & STEERING

Front MacPherson struts, coil springs, anti-roll bar **Rear** Multi-link, coil springs, anti-roll bar
Steering EPAS, rack and pinion; 2.1 turns lock to lock; 11.5m turning circle

BRAKES

Front 340mm ventilated discs, two-piston calipers
Rear 310mm ventilated discs
Handbrake type Electronic, automatic

SAFETY

Euro NCAP rating 5 stars (2025)
Adult occupant 89%, child occupant 78%, vulnerable road users 82%, safety assist 76%

EMISSIONS & TAX

CO₂ 193g/km
BIK at 20/40% pcm £305/£609

VERDICT

Hottish Tiguan cousin is likeable but a bit too sensible

★★★★☆

The quickest Terramar in the line-up is enviable family transport. It serves up a strong blend of ride comfort, cross-country performance and practicality, and does so with an interior that rises above the slightly staid norms of the class. There's attention to detail here too: in the steering and the damping, which would seem to have been set up by people who know the value of driving dynamics that are quietly satisfying and never irksome or tiring. The 2.0-litre Terramar has a breadth that would make it just as at home on a British B-road as on a glass-smooth French autoroute, and we like that about this GT-ish crossover. That said, the proposition would be stronger still if Cupra had given this top Terramar the extra oomph we know exists in this motor. And also perhaps the VW Golf R's playful torque splitter.

TESTERS' NOTES

RICHARD LANE
I rather liked this car, mostly because of its relative simplicity – a 2.0-litre turbo motor, a decent dual-clutch 'box plus four-wheel drive, and nothing more complicated. Feels strangely old-fashioned these days.

ILLYA VERPRAET
I'm surprised Cupra wasn't allowed to screw more power out of this EA888 unit. In the past, Seat was always given reasonably free rein with its sportier hatchbacks, some of which were very hardcore indeed. Around 310bhp would set this model apart.

FACELIFT FIXES

- More power, please – the chassis can cope.
- Lose – or have the option of losing – the copper interior bits. They feel very 2020.
- Add the rear torque splitter from the Golf R.

RANKING RIVALS

	1	2	3	4	5	6
		CUPRA TERRAMAR 2.0 TSI 4DRIVE VZ2				
	VW TIGUAN 2.0 TSI 4MOTION R-LINE Pseudo-GTI Tiguan lacks the Cupra's sporting overtones but still handles and is more spacious.		**SKODA KODIAQ vRS 2.0 TSI DSG** Commanding in this company, and with seven seats, but not a driver's car, despite a good turn of pace.	**BMW X1 M35i xDRIVE** Quickest X1 is also the joint quickest here. Agility and grip to spare. Ride quality is its weakness.	**AUDI Q3 45 TFSI S LINE QUATTRO** Getting long in the tooth and not as fluid as the Cupra, but still handsome and sure-footed enough.	**MINI COUNTRYMAN JCW ALL4** Doesn't feel like the well-honed performance model we'd hoped for. Nor is it exciting enough.
	★★★★⯪		★★★★☆	★★★⯪☆	★★★⯪☆	★★★☆☆
Price	£50,220		£53,690	£50,335	£47,055	£42,750
Power, torque	261bhp, 295lb ft		261bhp, 295lb ft	296bhp, 295lb ft	242bhp, 273lb ft	296bhp, 295lb ft
0-62mph, top speed	5.9sec, 150mph		6.4sec, 143mph	5.4sec, 155mph	5.8sec, 147mph	5.4sec, 155mph
CO₂, economy	190g/km, 33.7mpg		190g/km, 33.8mpg	175g/km, 36.2mpg	198g/km, 32.5mpg	177g/km, 36.2mpg

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MATT SAUNDERS

Testing, testing

Okay, chaps, activate the red and yellow smoke in three, two, one...

The Red Arrows, eh? Aren't they brilliant? And what a way for a fast jet pilot to vector themselves into semi-retirement after a distinguished service career hooning about in Typhoons.

What would the automotive equivalent be? Caterham drift school instruction for an ex-rally pro? It's not quite the same prospect, somehow. So why don't we create one? Why couldn't there be an automotive display team staffed by ex-magazine road testers and 'gentleman drivers', specialising in formation driving?

'Skidmark Synchro' could perform exclusively in slightly low-rent locations: disused airfields, C-list race circuits that most of us have forgotten still exist and those extra-quiet stretches of dual-carriageway public roads that don't really go anywhere.

There wouldn't be many places to stand and watch from, but that wouldn't matter because we would be entirely rubbish, so nobody would come in the first place.

The best place to 'enjoy us' would be via an internet live stream shot out of the boot of a Skoda Superb Estate tracking car that's half full of empty coffee cups and bottles of Windolene.

Skidmark Synchro would, for the most part, be wholly unworthy of its name. Most of our display manoeuvres would be undertaken at 25mph, with cars in oddly close formation, going around corners that you could probably take at triple the speed.

The announcer might say "and now the team presents… Arrowhead!", and we would shuffle around superfluously behind the camera car. "The Daredevil Parallelogram!" would, from a few hundred yards away, look 99% identical, except that, for those watching online, the slow-moving electric crossover vehicle nearest the camera would be different, its driver positioned just so in order to hide their ashamed face behind the car's girthy A-pillar.

> **"The skids would be overwhelmingly half-arsed, ham-fisted"**

On occasion, we would have proper rear-wheel-drive performance cars and do skids. We would have to. Except, when observed live, these skids couldn't be carefully edited to make the road testers seem at least halfway competent. They would be overwhelmingly half-arsed, ham-fisted, live skids.

Typically, we would have between six and 13 attempts at two- or three-car drift shots behind a camera car, most of which wouldn't result in any synchronised oversteer whatsoever.

Badly timed and positioned sliding, narrow avoidance of collision and general bad temper, embarrassment and blaming of the workman's tools from those responsible would be their primary content.

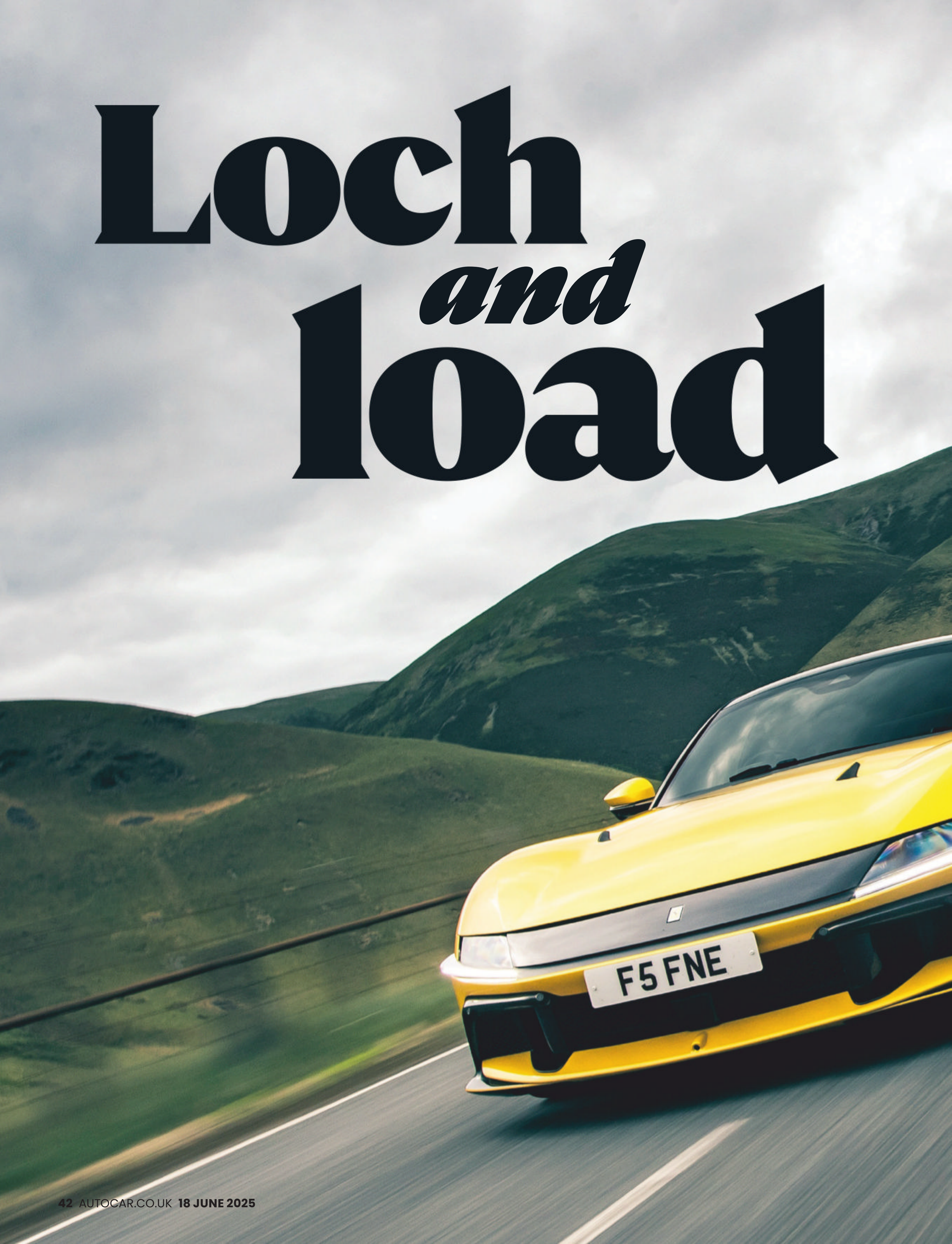
Every synchronised skidding display would also have to end with at least one of the car's rear tyres delaminating, after which it couldn't take part in any subsequent part of the show.

The members of Skidmark Synchro would each have honorary responsibilities. Skidmark 1 would have the most celebrated reputation as a 'helmsman' driver. They would turn up at every display an hour late, never having fuelled their car, be the first to leave and insist on taking the most powerful car with them, whether it's still needed or not.

The full team would number some 10 in total, but Skidmark 1 would only be willing to talk to Skidmark 2 (the next most senior) and Skidmark 8 (always 20 minutes early, brings cleaning gear and flasks of tea and spends most of the display worrying about what everyone is having for lunch).

Skidmark 4 is the ambitious renegade most likely to agree to a misguided jump shot. Skidmark 6 is universally liked, wears ostentatious trainers and can drift one-handed while simultaneously tapping out a WhatsApp funny. Skidmark 7 is a taciturn vegan of mercurial talent, whom it is impossible to feed from the average garage 'food to go' chiller. And Skidmark 10 is the 'work experience' reserve driver, who turns up at every display in his 25-year-old Mazda MX-5, spends displays cleaning, fuelling and shuttling cars around and getting rained on, and yet inexplicably manages to remain chipper and film it all for his or her DriveTribe account. Skidmark 1 last cleaned a car in 1993.

I haven't worked out yet how much I will charge for tickets, but I am taking applications for positions in the squadron. If you're interested, you know what to do.



Loch *and* load

These epic new Aston and Ferrari V12s have brought a famous old rivalry back to the boil. **RICHARD LANE** goes all guns blazing north of the border

PHOTOGRAPHY JACK HARRISON

The 12Cilindri didn't have the easiest start in the court of public opinion, and not just because of its cumbersome name. "The V12 isn't bombastic enough!" brayed forum posters. "The Pontiac Aztek wants its rear styling back," X-ers snarked. And on it went.

Maybe they had a point. With its breadvan-ish tail and hyper-chiselled prow, the very latest Ferrari GT (styled in-house, Pininfarina's 66-year influence having ended with the F12 Berlinetta) is provocative. Particulate filters also mean this most recent iteration of the 65deg Tipo 140 engine is indeed tamer on the ears than before.

But temper your prejudices. Remember that many considered the 550 Maranello ugly when it hit the scene in 1996. Remember also that, especially in these darkened times of the fun-car witch-hunt, it is better to have a stirring timbre than raw amplitude. In any case, what really matters today is how the £339,000 *doe-dee-chee-chi-lin-dree* feels to drive, and the early signs after its endless banana of a clamshell bonnet peels west off the A74(M) and we wail off into the Lanarkshire wilds are spectacularly promising.

Lurking a few miles up the road is a new Aston Martin. Unlike the Ferrari, we've already tasted the Vanquish on home soil, so we know it borders on the spectacular. Ingredients: a lavish cabin, a stunning silhouette and, in its handling, a heavy-set poise that melts so sweetly into slithers of oversteer it makes you laugh out loud. It's a very modern Aston (with Apple CarPlay and all).

It has the numbers, too. The old DBS was outgunned by the 12Cilindri's predecessor, the 812 Superfast, but Aston hasn't let that go unanswered, aided by the fact that, with only 1000 Vanquish examples ever to leave Gaydon, fleet emissions aren't such a concern. As such, even though Ferrari cheekily includes a 5bhp bump in its claimed 819bhp output, owing to a ram-air effect at speed (honestly, whatever next?), the Mk3 Vanquish is still more powerful. Its twin-turbo 5.2-litre V12 makes 824bhp and nearly half as much torque again as its atmospheric 6.5-litre counterpart. The carbonfibre-rich coachwork is indisputably prettier as well. V12's louder, too.

No wonder Aston is so confident in this car's ability to compete that, for the first time in this sort of contest, there's price parity. The Brit is still less expensive but now by only 1.5%.

Scotland, then. It's the venue for this 1643bhp instalment of an especially juicy rivalry, which comes at an especially captivating moment in the intertwined histories of these car makers. Aston and Ferrari have long been kindred, but in 2025 the synergies really are striking. Both are now publicly listed and compete in the fastest, most glamorous and most high-tech spectacle in motorsport, where not only races but also reputations are won and lost. The road car ranges also shadow one another like never before. If you're fortunate enough to be on the hunt for an emotion-driven super-coupé, super-SUV or 12-cylinder super-GT, you can get it from Maranello or from Gaydon. And often nowhere else. When the PHEV Valhalla arrives, we will be able to say the same for mid-engined supercars.

For the offensively rich and well-connected petrolhead, both companies also offer road-legal Le Mans-flavoured dream machines: the new 1138bhp F80 and the 1.1-tonnes-of-downforce Valkyrie (not quite so new). Meanwhile, deploying those cars' grizzled, glamorous racing counterparts in the form of the 499P and Valkyrie AMR-LMH, Aston and Ferrari only days ago battled alongside one another for outright victory at Le Mans, for the first time since 1959 (when the DBR1s of the David Brown Racing Dept saw off a 250 GT quadruple threat).

And another thing, to drive home this affinity. Until the recent arrival of Adrian Hallmark, Aston's CEO was Amedeo Felisa, who once occupied the very same post at Ferrari. We have yet to see quite such a high-profile transfer in the other direction, but who knows what the future holds? Mr Hallmark is rated.

All of which is to say, if you want to compare Aston and Ferrari, there's no end of criteria. Yet the comparison that hits hardest and means the most remains Il Classico. We're talking grand tourers, especially the V12 ones. Maybe I'm too romantic, but for me these extraordinary cars still define the companies. Does it matter which wins? In truth, not especially. I'll tell you now that, barring the odd quirk, both the 12Cilindri and the Vanquish offer an experience so absurdly gratifying, exciting and evocative that you would give a kidney to own either. Today's verdict is more of a gun-to-the-head affair.

The drive up from London to the Scottish Borders confirmed the 12Cilindri is a milder-mannered sort than the 812 Superfast it replaces, even if the V12 has now 600rpm greater scope and redlines at 9500rpm – extraordinary for a 6496cc unit with 12,500-mile service intervals. This toning down of the format is welcome. I loved the Superfast but it wasn't a well-conceived GT. It lived in a permanent state of arousal, as a hell-raising supercar in grand tourer drag. It was, even among 800bhp supercars, niche.

There are strong traces of that DNA in the 12Cilindri but the new car is more laissez-faire. From cold it fires into the urgent, faintly industrial idle we're familiar with, although the din is softer and more nasal. The EPAS gearing is still lightning-quick, but there's more linear ▸

Ferrari cabin is more mature than its forebear but still has the same huge paddles

You call that a clamshell? *This* is a clamshell

“We’ve already tested the new Vanquish on home soil so know it borders on the spectacular”

12Cilindri’s wheelbase is notably shorter than the Aston’s, even before 4WS

Vanquish is handsome enough to stop traffic, even in a subtle grey

> *“Your job in the Ferrari is to dial into a unique relationship between steering and body roll”*

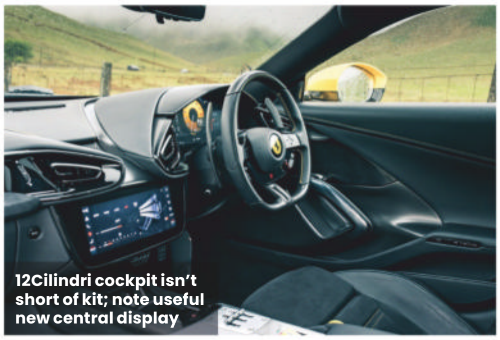
◂ off-centre response, married to an all-round heightened sense of maturity and heft. Get going and with stellar engine management you can even pull 40mph at a silken 1000rpm in eighth. The 12Cilindri isn’t quite Porsche 911-drivable about town but it’s not far off. The cabin, with its U-shaped glass canopy panel, also feels more capacious and inviting than the road-racer 812’s ever did, even if the fussy dash is obviously designed to reduce the cost of offering both LHD and RHD. That’s a shame, because it diminishes the cockpit feel. It can feel like you’re playing Outrun with another, albeit vacant, arcade machine adjacent. Otherwise, this is a hospitable interior. In light leather it would be fabulous.

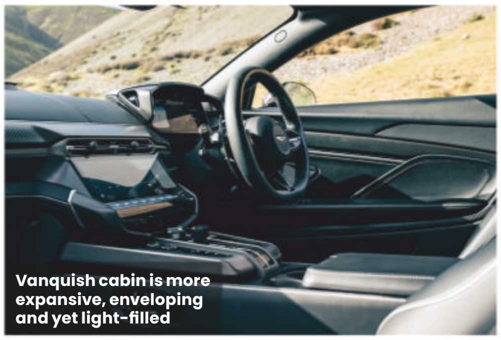
During 350 miles of motorway running up to Lanarkshire, the digi-needle of the Ferrari’s central rev counter rarely swept beyond 4000rpm, because it didn’t need to. Peak thrust of 500lb ft doesn’t arrive until 7250rpm but this engine’s ability to swiftly usher you from 50-70mph with nothing more than a creamy purr in sixth is fantastically effortless. There are massage seats and wireless phone charging, and Ferrari’s ever-useful Bumpy Road mode

It’s less raucous than 812 Superfast of yore but much of the time more rewarding

Ferrari V12 sits far back in the chassis. It's good for 819bhp and 500lb ft

Aston V12 isn't so pretty but mullers the Ferrari for torque


12Cilindri cockpit isn't short of kit; note useful new central display


Vanquish cabin is more expansive, enveloping and yet light-filled

Ferrari has classic luggage deck with plush leather straps

Aston's storage is more compromised, needing the bespoke luggage

Hatchback opening makes the Ferrari more capacious

Vanquish boot is on the small side for such an imposing GT

(press the red damper toggle on the manettino) remains a superbly simple way of UK-proofing the ride quality. All in, this feels like something of a reset for the front-engined Ferrari V12. And the result? On arrival, I feel reasonably rested.

We're dwelling on the prosaic stuff for a moment because, in the real world, it's critical. A big part of the appeal of rarefied super-GTs resides in the fact they are still, if used properly, wonderful tools for blatting between wonderful places, with the odd back-road thrash thrown in.

Hopping into the Aston while my senses are still brimming with 12Cilindri feedback is enlightening. So much light in here! At the same time, I feel more embedded in the machine, because not only are the scuttle and beltlines higher but the seats are softer and more substantially bolstered. It's a neat duality. Opting for the carbon-shelled buckets in the Ferrari would give you greater support and set you an inch or so lower in the monocoque but it still wouldn't feel this natural. The Aston's cabin is a lounge-like space, and the vast panoramic roof and rear quarterlights mean all-round visibility is excellent. That is handy, because this Aston also feels leviathanic compared with its foe – more so even than its 120mm-longer body suggests.

Which brings us to weight. When we put the Vanquish on the scales at Horiba MIRA, the readout said 1952kg split 51:49 front to rear, with the 82-litre fuel tank brimmed. We did the same for the Ferrari. Result: 1806kg split 48:52, with 92 litres on board. Admittedly, this particular 12Cilindri has £54,754 of lightweight carbonfibre options on it – the price of an Alpine A110 – but it still undercuts the Aston to the tune of two people and does so while carrying actuators for rear-axle steering and a dual-clutch gearbox. The Vanquish has neither and, with its carbon bonnet and comparatively straightforward layout, you do wonder how it has turned out to be quite so portly.

It means the 12Cilindri packs the better power-to-weight ratio, and chooses to pair it with narrower tyres, as well as a wheelbase some 185mm shorter – and, in effect, made 20mm shorter still by those steering rear wheels, aka Virtual Short Wheelbase. Full turns of the rim between the lock-stops? The Vanquish needs 2.3 while the Ferrari is done after 1.9. Right, then. When it comes to uncorking that V12, the 12Cilindri is now looking like it could well have more than mere 'traces' of Superfast DNA in it…

In the end, the Ferrari sails close to the wind at times but ultimately doesn't push its dynamic personality too far, as the egocentric Superfast revelled in doing. Charge down a good B-road (third gear has you covered from 20mph to 120mph, although when the shifts are this sublimely crisp, there's a joy in snagging second or fourth for the hell of it) and you will have an awareness of the car's brain whirring away. An Aspirated Torque Shaping control logic limits torque at lower revs to give the V12 delivery even greater theatre, and the rear-steer (with its single degree of motion) is plumbed into an ecosystem of sensors and controllers that govern the behaviour of both the electronic limited-slip differential and an ABS system taken from the 296 GTB. That, despite all this, the 12Cilindri feels natural is an extraordinary feat.

Your only task in the Ferrari is to ensure you dial yourself fully into the unique relationship between steering and roll. That quick rack and the suspension's manner of letting the body take a fair degree of lean means it's still quite easy ▸

Heavier Vanquish isn't as agile as its rival but as a GT has the edge

◂ to overdrive the 12Cilindri, especially if you have the dampers in their Bumpy Road mode. But get on its terms, building some confidence in the process, and you have a car you can lean on as hard as you like; one whose joyful ability to scythe into and grip through corners can be trusted entirely and whose subtle balance can be precisely manipulated with the throttle.

Imagine a three-dimensional cuboid as long as the car and two inches tall, set at the height of those piercing headlights. It's within the generous vertical scope of this space – this plane – that the 12Cilindri seems to levitate: pitching, squatting, expressing itself freely but always with sensational control and an unctuous smoothness. Here we have the pliancy of a super-saloon, the precision of a supercar and the indulgent balance of a front-engined GT. It is a singular experience that is fun and exciting but also just a little bit cerebral.

The Aston can't compete with this, but then it isn't trying to. It has earthier charms, beginning with the act of sliding into a homely, enveloping, beautifully wrought cabin and firing up, with a gargling flare of revs, a burlier take on the V12 format. The Vanquish reeks of personality, and when you pull away you realise that it is very much a complementary character to the Ferrari.

Still, in the interest of being thorough, there are some salient points of difference. The Aston's steering is perhaps more naturally sped than the

BACK-CATALOGUE BARGAINS

One of the great benefits of this being a generations-old feud is that you don't have to spend top whack on the latest metal to get a serious slice of the action. In fact, relative to the £300,000-plus prices of the new Vanquish and 12Cilindri, you don't have to spend very much at all, particularly in the case of older Aston Martin flagships.

Although it's possible to go back to the millennium – to the stellar 550 Maranello (later updated to the 575M, although ensure you find one fitted with the Fiorano Handling Pack) and the Mk1 Vanquish – for something passably modern you need to shop in the post-2010 era.

Here you will find the Mk2 Vanquish, which wasn't as hand-finished as the original but had a better gearbox in the form of ZF's Touchtronic II six-speeder and a beautiful interior with more room (the later Vanquish S adopted an even slicker ZF eight-speeder, as well as an extra 24bhp, taking the total to 568bhp).

Its Italian adversary at the time was the F12 Berlinetta, which replaced the 599 GTB. Both the Ferrari and the Aston arrived in 2012, and the wild-looking, 6.3-litre, 730bhp F12 is particularly traceable to the 12Cilindri in terms of its design, handling and, not least, performance.

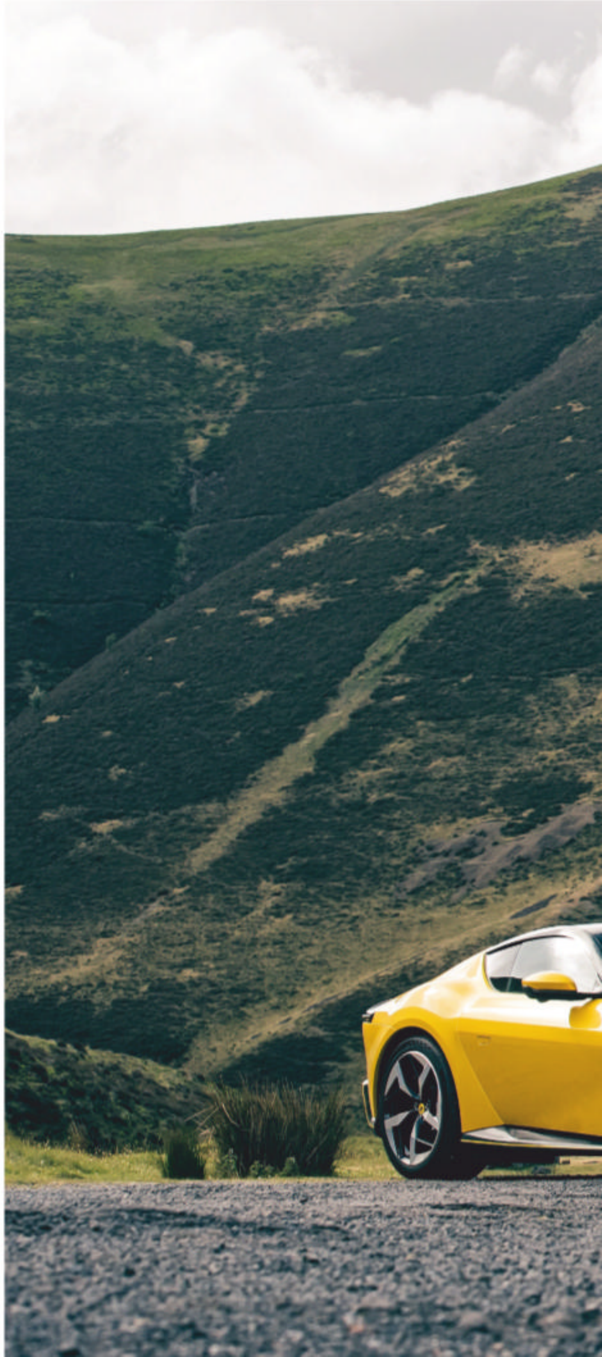
Perhaps that's why prices are so firm. At the time of writing, the cheapest Ferrari Approved example we could find was a 19,000-mile 2015 car for £149,800.

We guarantee that car will feel sensationally quick even by modern standards. In 2013, we recorded our road test F12 at 19.7sec over the standing kilometre. That is only a tenth slower than the current Mk3 Vanquish's time, recorded this year. Remarkable.

While the F12 is similar to the 12Cilindri, the differences between the Mk2 Vanquish and the new Mk3 are more profound. Since 2012, Aston's flagship has adopted turbocharging, has lost its rear seats and has swelled in terms of footprint and kerb weight. Mind you, the Mk2's particular version of the VH-generation bonded aluminium chassis also had its roots in the 2004 DB9, while the latest car is perfectly up to date in terms of platform.

The Mk2 Vanquish is a less impressive car than the F12, although it is notably more affordable, starting at around £60,000. We found a rather lovely 2014 example with just 23,000 miles for £71,950 at HR Owen in Reading.

You could also have this Vanquish in drop-top form, which was never offered on the F12. It's worth considering, because its 6.0-litre V12 sounds fabulous and the dynamics are somewhat laid-back by today's standards.



Ferrari's but is needlessly heavier, is lighter on communication and has a somewhat oleaginous motion by comparison. The same can broadly be said of the brake-pedal feel and, unsurprisingly, the throttle response. You're never going to get as close to the action in the Vanquish as you always are in the gymnastic, transparent 12Cilindri.

Perhaps it's better that way. While the Italian pitches itself into corners with perfect obedience, the Brit's endless nose takes longer to heave itself towards an apex. Before you can enjoy the lean muscle of the car's prodigious mid-corner balance, there's a thin membrane of fatty understeer you need to cut through. Whether this is due to set-up, or the lack or rear-steering in the Aston, or simply the larger front contact patch (great for outright grip, less so for poise), it's impossible to say. It's not the layout, though. Open up the bonnets and you see that, relative to the front axle, the Vanquish's block is only an inch further forward than that of the 12Cilindri, although the latter's does nestle notably lower.

This agility deficit affects the way you enjoy the car. It prefers longer radii and the more methodical, demarcated approach of brake-turn-throttle, whereas the Ferrari invites you to take mad liberties in the blurring of those processes.

All of this is in evidence on the morning of day two, when I'm following Matt Prior, who is at the wheel of the Aston, through a slalom of bends in the pouring rain. My colleague – no slouch – subtly straight-lines the sequence, taxing the Aston's chassis as little as possible. Fair enough; I'd do the same. But right now I'm revelling in every degree of direction change the road permits, such is the alacrity of the Ferrari.

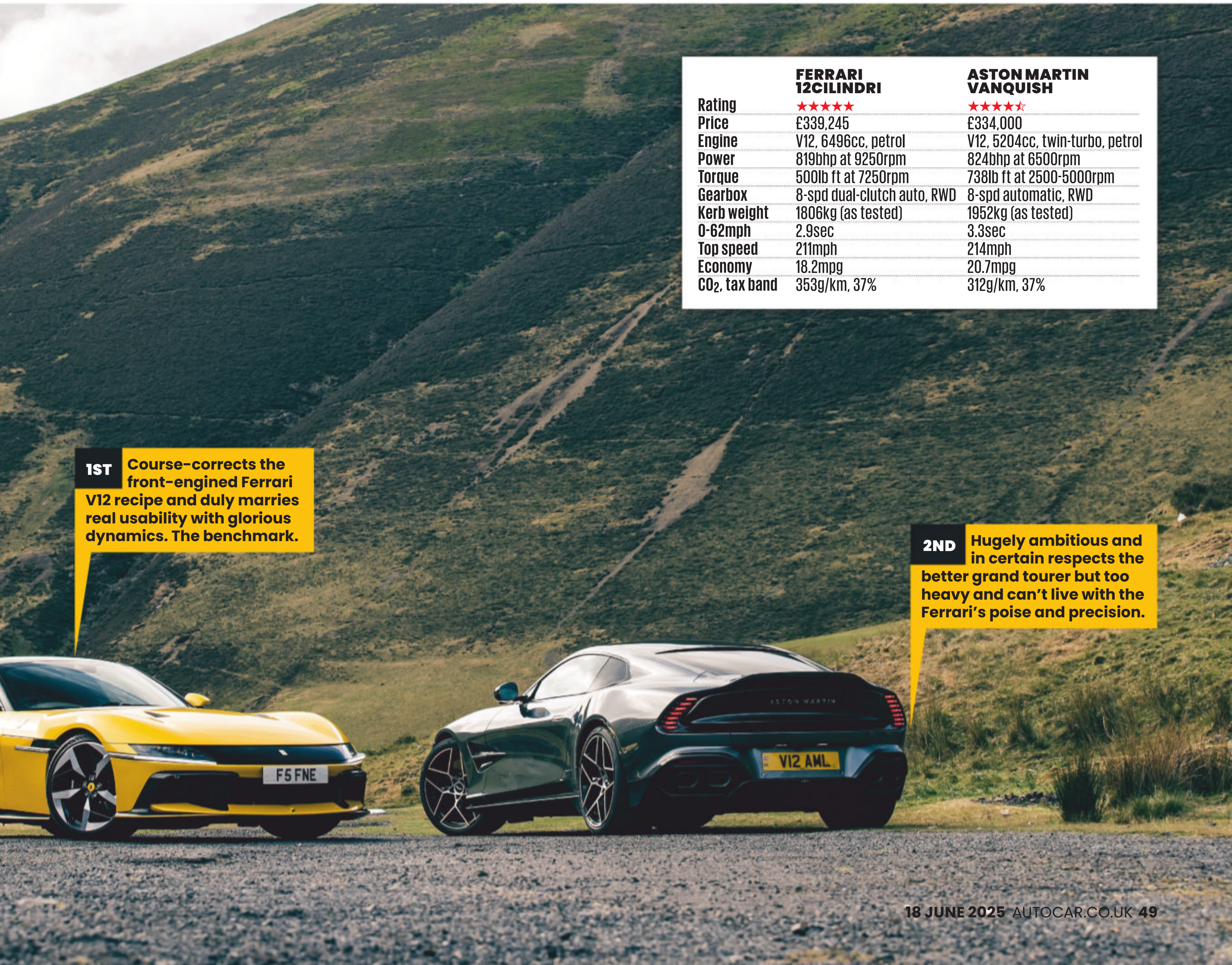
Number in middle of Vanquish's instrument binnacle goes from 0-214

Ferrari's naturally aspirated V12 revs all the way to 9500rpm

And yet the Aston is just so enjoyable to be around. On poor surfaces it is routinely crashier than the delicate Ferrari, its damping feeling less sophisticated and the presence of unsprung mass seeming altogether greater, but elsewhere it has a supreme slickness – an ease that allows it to inhale big distances while entertaining the driver. Being comically over-endowed with torque has twin benefits: the sense of bottomless, latent power is itself gratifying, while actually using it in a targeted way makes the Vanquish ready to play and have fun at any moment. The performance is outrageous, too. At 8000rpm the 12Cilindri will put your stomach in free fall, but by that point the surprisingly sweet-sounding Vanquish has already disappeared up the road.

It's savage, but not *a* savage, although both cars could forfeit a bit of their truly OTT speed for better refinement at a cruise. Focusing narrowly on big-distance travel, the Vanquish offers more, instilling a sense of wellbeing its wild rival can't match. The Ferrari counters with dynamics that take your breath away, and a new-found balance of attributes that result in it being the world's best super-GT. So sod what the armchair critics say: to drive this Ferrari is to experience a masterpiece.

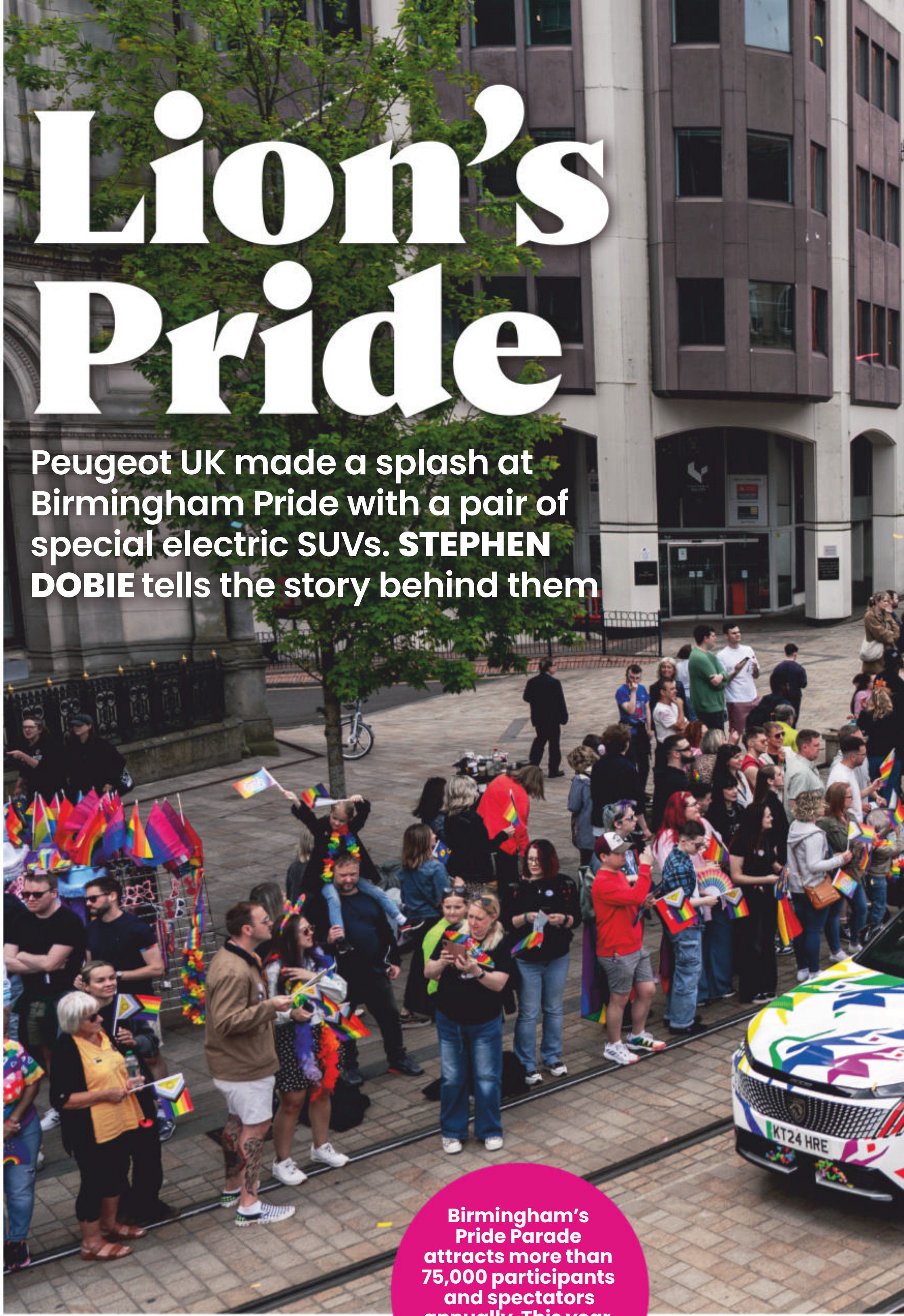
	FERRARI 12CILINDRI	**ASTON MARTIN VANQUISH**
Rating	★★★★★	★★★★½
Price	£339,245	£334,000
Engine	V12, 6496cc, petrol	V12, 5204cc, twin-turbo, petrol
Power	819bhp at 9250rpm	824bhp at 6500rpm
Torque	500lb ft at 7250rpm	738lb ft at 2500-5000rpm
Gearbox	8-spd dual-clutch auto, RWD	8-spd automatic, RWD
Kerb weight	1806kg (as tested)	1952kg (as tested)
0-62mph	2.9sec	3.3sec
Top speed	211mph	214mph
Economy	18.2mpg	20.7mpg
CO_2, tax band	353g/km, 37%	312g/km, 37%


1ST Course-corrects the front-engined Ferrari V12 recipe and duly marries real usability with glorious dynamics. The benchmark.

2ND Hugely ambitious and in certain respects the better grand tourer but too heavy and can't live with the Ferrari's poise and precision.

Lion's Pride

Peugeot UK made a splash at Birmingham Pride with a pair of special electric SUVs. **STEPHEN DOBIE** tells the story behind them



Birmingham's Pride Parade attracts more than 75,000 participants and spectators annually. This year, Peugeot sponsored the Parade as well as joining it.

Peugeot 9X8 racer's lion livery inspired the design of the Pride EVs

June is Pride month, and whether or not you consider yourself part of the LGBTQ+ community, you can't fail to have noticed retailers applying rainbow bunting to their stores or daubing vibrant colours on their social media pages. What once appeared an open goal is no longer such an easy win, however: LGBTQ+ folk and their allies are alert to 'pinkwashing' – brief, superficial allyship – while anyone desperate to identify as neither party may question the need for corporate diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) measures at all.

Thankfully, we can rely on one company to do it properly. "It is clear that there is a deep-rooted appreciation for DEI across the entire network," said editor Mark Tisshaw of Stellantis at the Autocar Drivers of Change awards back in February, where the global car giant picked up numerous gongs. "This is a company that sets out to bring about tangible and meaningful change."

That was evident at last month's Birmingham Pride Parade, where a pair of silent but in no way subdued Peugeot electric SUVs blended in rather nicely with the boisterous crowd around them.

"This is a big Pride celebration close to our UK headquarters, so it's really important for us to bring together all of our employees, all of our values, and to go and celebrate in Birmingham," says Peugeot UK marketing director Maxime Bailly, himself a Drivers of Change winner.

As well as championing LGBTQ+ folk in the workplace, Peugeot is the title sponsor of July's Attitude Pride Awards, a role that includes a five-figure donation to the Attitude Magazine Foundation and the numerous causes it supports.

Bailly says: "We want to embrace the future, to create something where everybody can be the best version of themselves. The landscape might be a bit challenging at the moment, but I think it's important to keep working, to keep pushing."

"It's important both internally and externally," adds Peugeot's global marketing boss, Phil York. "We know that having a diverse internal team is crucial for creativity and idea generation and making sure we can represent our customers and respond to their needs. From a creative [perspective], having many different points of view in the room increases your chances of coming up with ingenious ideas, which is part of our DNA historically. It's also preparing us as a company for the future."

While York can't comment on Stellantis's position on the situation in the US, where President Trump has been vocal about his desire to roll back DEI schemes, he tells us: "Stellantis as a company is very committed to diversity and inclusion as a way of nurturing creativity and talent within the organisation. Using gender diversity as an example, at a corporate level we had an objective to deliver 30% female talent in key posts by 2025, climbing to 40% by 2040. We're already ahead of that target with 33.5% in 2024."

Peugeot UK is Stellantis's LGBTQ+ leader, and it is hoped that other markets are inspired by its Birmingham parade cars, whose 'Pride of Lions' decoration neatly refocuses the 9X8 Le Mans Hypercar's livery in rainbow colours. The vivid e-3008 and e-5008 will soon tour Stellantis UK sites, before being offered for dealer displays.

"Today we talk about the LGBTQ+ community," says Bailly, "but through our other DEI initiatives we support young talent, we've got Women of Stellantis, we work extremely closely with the armed forces, and more. It's all about creating a culture where everybody feels respected, heard and empowered."

"We want to create something where everybody can be the best version of themselves"

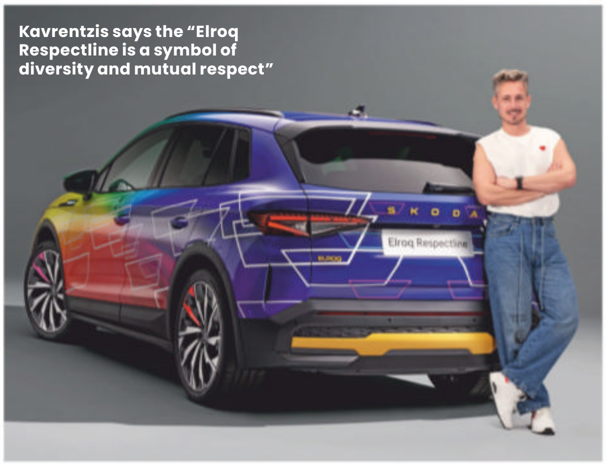
"IT'S ABOUT RESPECT, NOT PRIVILEGE"

Rainbow electric SUVs are all the rage, with Skoda's Elroq Respectline just as dazzling as Peugeot's efforts. It's the latest car in a series started by global press fleet coordinator Petr Kavrentzis.

"When we started the Enyaq Respectline project a couple of years ago, its purpose quickly became clear: to create something together with people we didn't know before," he says. "People from different departments, different cultures, all united by a shared passion.

"This remains the most valuable aspect of the entire Respectline project. This spirit is already deeply rooted in what it means to be a 'Skodian'. This word signifies being part of one great team, working together to create great products, shape a better future and live by shared values. This truly feels like *our* company.

"Diversity is everywhere – in plants, animals and the world around us. I continuously advocate for this same respect for diversity among people. Inclusion and equality should come naturally, rather than being perceived as minorities asking for privileges or special treatment. It's about genuine respect, not just 'tolerance', and certainly not about privileging anyone. That's why we chose the name Respectline."



Kavrentzis says the "Elroq Respectline is a symbol of diversity and mutual respect"

Outside influence

General Motors is all but absent from the European car market, yet it recently opened a new car design studio in the UK. **STEVE CROPLEY** finds out why

PHOTOGRAPHY JOHN BRADSHAW

Julian Thomson is charged with bringing a European perspective to GM design

Ashbourne Drive sounds a bit more like a street full of retired bank managers than the location of an imposing, all-new General Motors advanced car design studio. But then Spa Park, through which Ashbourne Drive runs, isn't your usual British industrial estate either, missing out on shabby factories, Portakabins selling burgers and cars badly parked on every footpath.

Instead, GM's new European design base, quietly set up around three years ago on the outskirts of busy Leamington Spa by its director, Englishman Julian Thomson, is a tribute to the designer's art in itself. It is one of those impressive industrial buildings of the modern era designed for maximum interior flexibility – in this case, spacious mezzanine floors front and rear for offices and meeting rooms, a covered working area on one side of the ground floor for around 30 people and huge windows on the other to flood the working area with light.

The whole thing provides 25,000 square feet of space, dedicated to unbridled creativity, and outside is a high-walled yard for exterior viewings, complete with its own dark Tarmac, because cars look different on real roads.

In the centre of the building – occupying the approximate space of two tennis courts – are spaces for half a dozen full-sized car models in development, overhung by automated milling machines that can shape designs, according to digital instructions, even when the human staff are asleep or away for the weekend.

All rooms are sparsely but expensively furnished: this place may have started life as an industrial unit, but there's an aura of warmth and homeliness about it that encourages pride and feeds creativity.

"The amount of work we've done in the past couple of years is immense," says Thomson. "We've touched every brand, we've made lots of good friends and contacts in GM and we're already very much part of the process."

Still, the question hangs: why does GM need a design operation in Europe? After all, in the medium term, it will sell only electric Cadillacs, Corvette sports cars and some top-end commercial vehicles here, and these will very much be American cars. There used to be an impressive GM design studio at Luton, back in the heyday of Vauxhall, and an even bigger one at Rüsselsheim in Germany when Opel became the senior brand, but those were swept away when the PSA Group bought Opel-Vauxhall eight years ago.

Thomson has no doubts about his usefulness. If you run a multi-branded car company such as GM, he contends, more than anything else you need good ideas. And plenty of them.

"It's no longer good enough to design cars for one territory or another," he says. "Your designs must be understood everywhere. You need diversity among designers too – different backgrounds and ages. If you had a studio in just one area, you would get a very strong viewpoint reflecting specific trends, aspirations, lifestyles. GM knows this, and it knows it needs to gather influences from Europe. That's why we're here."

Other foreign locations leave no doubt that GM's global intentions are as strong as ever: there are two studios in the US (Detroit and California), plus one in South Korea and another in China.

The establishment in Ashbourne Drive seems to have been driven by when Thomson became available and the empathetic relationship he has developed with Michael Simcoe, GM's vice-president of design. Thomson is very experienced: he trained at the Royal College of Art in London, where he was sponsored by Ford, then joined Lotus, where he took the top job after Peter Stevens left, and famously designed the original Elise. After a couple of years at Volkswagen advanced design in Barcelona, he moved to Jaguar Land Rover, where he formed a happy partnership with Ian Callum, taking the top job when Callum departed. Then came GM.

"They said I could put this place anywhere in Europe," says Thomson, leaning back ▸

general motors
DESIGN

Studio's Leamington Spa home is "a real hotbed of car design talent"

◂ contentedly in his Warwickshire office, "so I suppose we could now be in Nice. But I like this area. It's a real hotbed of car design talent; there are half a dozen other big studios in the area. And I wanted to get things up and running quickly, to make a good impression. I had friends in design here who I absolutely knew were the best in the business so I was able to put a team together quickly. We've got 35 people – designers, engineers, digital designers and clay modellers – and we're a great team."

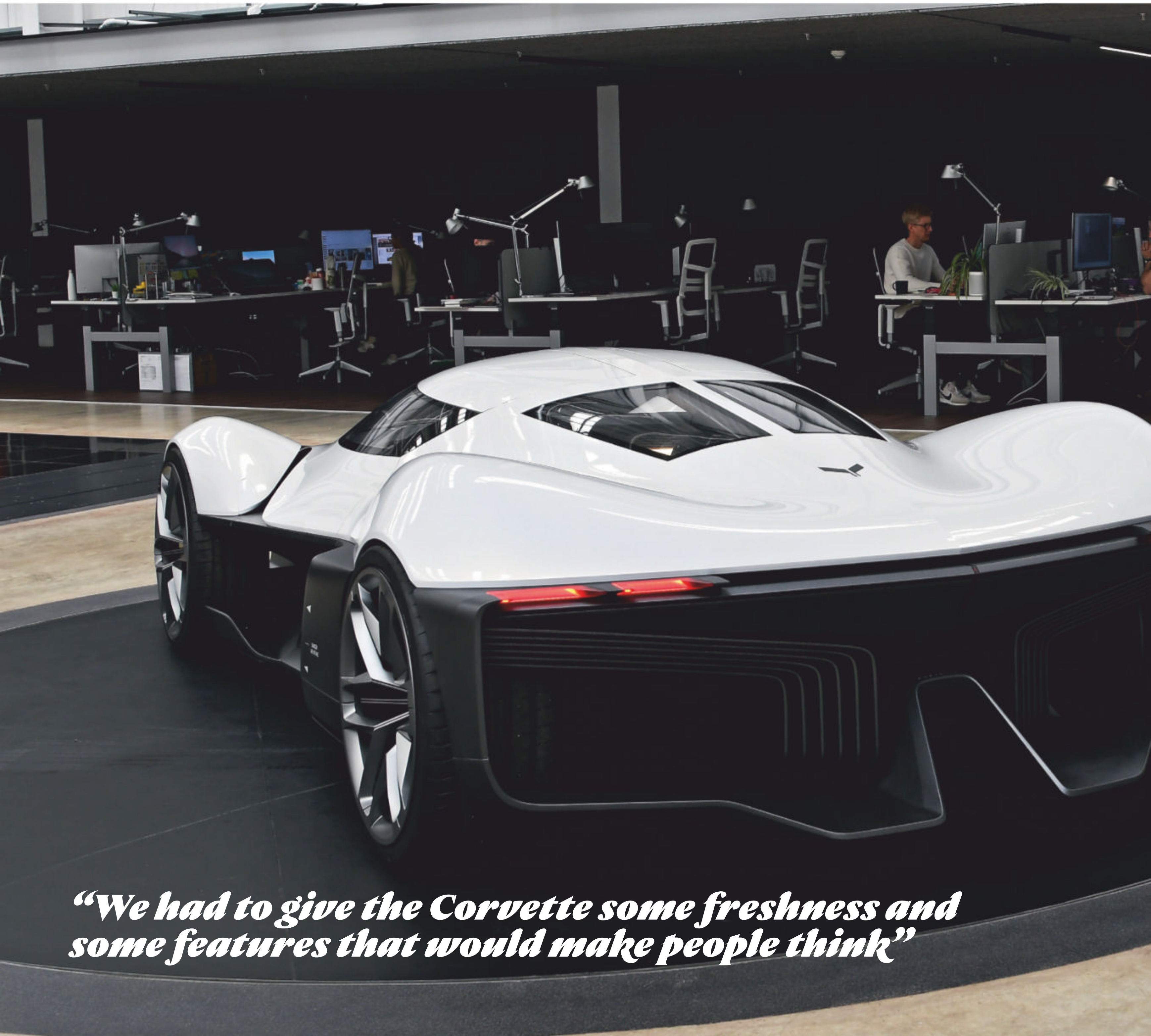
Thomson acknowledges that he's no architect, but he devised the studio layout himself, using prior experience of other studios, advice from experts and by talking to designer friends in the pub. He sent a detailed proposal off to GM and the bosses agreed to build something very much like it – a decent start.

"Of course there were some tough times," says Thomson. "I remember being in Thailand once, turning on a Teams [video conferencing] call late at night and being confronted by a grid of about 10 angry builders wanting to talk about drains and electrical supply. But we worked it out. That was just a low point. We're really happy with what we have now. It's working brilliantly."

Easily GM Design Europe's best-known piece of work so far is their concept for a Corvette C10 – one model beyond the C9 that is approaching production as a replacement for today's C8. It is one of three concepts commissioned by Simcoe as a way of influencing the C9. It's an unusual way of doing things, but the UK effort has evidently been well received across the pond.

One of the challenges for Europe is dealing with the issue of Americanness, says Thomson: "When we did the Corvette, some people thought we would just do a European car with a Corvette badge on it. But that would have completely missed the point. Corvette has a tremendous history; it's the world's most successful sports car. We had to respect that – but hopefully give

Thomson shows Prior his biggest design yet – the design studio itself



"We had to give the Corvette some freshness and some features that would make people think"

it some freshness and some features that would make people think."

The key to this new challenge of doing American cars in Europe, believes Thomson, is to recognise the things Europeans value in American design: "Everyone watches American films and TV and buys American clothes. Ideas of optimism, of confidence, of entertainment are seen a lot of American design. You see it in engineering projects like Nasa's Apollo programmes. Our job is to present this from a new viewpoint and not to be stuck in a groove."

The fact that Thomson has been involved in advanced design for much of his career – at VW, at Ford and now at GM – makes him more confident than most might be about the British studio's job of presenting designs that probably won't make production but will probably affect those that do.

"We need a certain naivety to be valuable," he explains. "We don't know what a [Chevrolet] Silverado is like the Americans do. It wasn't bred into us. We have an impression, but that's a different thing. Our value, part of our brief, is to play the role of the customer and look at the product with fresh, questioning eyes."

I suggest that it's hard not to imagine American design teams, who might be working on their third generation of some well-known model, being irritated by a bunch of British upstarts. But Thomson bats the idea away: "Our aim is to be surprising with no surprises. We don't want just to annoy people but to stretch their thinking a bit and to present new ways of reaching design goals. Sometimes we're there to shock people."

Thomson has in a long career seen unfortunate examples of an absence of this 'stretching'. He recalls an event at VW when no fewer than 18 full-sized concepts for the next Passat were presented, most of whose creators were intent on "winning" by anticipating what other teams did rather than presenting their best work. At Jaguar, he recalls, a constant comment on advanced design proposals was: "That's not a Jag."

This experience is the main reason why Thomson always involves his entire team in formative discussions about every new project. He has seen the value of diverse ideas and the dangers of not hearing them.

"A lot of our younger people are better than me," he says cheerfully. "I know how to design a car, but I'm not one of them. There are plenty of times when I don't represent the customer as well as they do. Why would I employ a designer who has just done five years' training just to scribble down what I think?

Thomson can't say when – or even whether – a car designed at Ashbourne Drive will ever appear in showrooms, and in a way he doesn't care. But if he comes to recognise certain lines on the C10 Corvette (and on other models that can't be named), he will know that he has fulfilled the brief.

HOW GM INVENTED CAR DESIGN

Julian Thomson is especially proud to have joined the firm that invented car design.

He tells the story of Harley Earl, who started work in his father's coachbuilding business and eventually built a company making special cars for stars in Hollywood.

Earl pioneered clay modelling, using clay he found washed into nearby valleys after floods to make his designs in 3D. The clay modelling process used today is a direct development of Earl's discovery.

Against opposition from managers, accountants and process-obsessed engineers, Earl was also first to use free-form sketching for car designs, and in 1927 he opened the first-ever styling studio, often referred to by sceptics as 'the beauty parlour'.

Earl had discovered car design as it is still practised today. He built the first full-sized clay model and the first genuine concept car, the 1938 Buick Y-Job, which for about a decade he would drive to work. Today, much admired, it lives in GM's Heritage Centre in Sterling Heights, Michigan.

Earl (above) started concept car tradition with this wonderful Buick

GETTY IMAGES

LIVING WITH A...

Where our long-term test cars have been and what they've done

"Its range of 198 miles compares favourably with the Renault 5's Urban Range model"

FIRST REPORT

CITROEN E-C3

Everyone's got 5 fever, but there's another new French small EV in town

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see whether Citroën's new small EV can challenge the class-leading Renault 5

From the MG 4 to the Renault 5, the small electric car is all of a sudden in vogue. Battery technology has at last started to become more cost-effective and it seems that some manufacturers have finally cracked the code to bring electric power to the masses in a more compact package, rather than in the form of a great big SUV.

It's these two areas – cost and compactness – in which our fleet's new arrival will appeal most, its wallet-friendly price being the headline-grabber here. Starting from £22,095, the Citroën ë-C3 is the latest affordable new small EV to emerge from the Stellantis stable. It's positioned comfortably among the UK's top 10 cheapest electric cars, ahead of key rivals such as the small car du jour 5 (£22,995), the quirky new Hyundai Inster (£23,505) and the recently updated Vauxhall Corsa Electric (£26,170).

The ë-C3 is based on Stellantis's value-focused Smart Car platform, which can house both electric and combustion powertrains and is shared with the C3 Aircross, Fiat Grande Panda and Vauxhall Frontera. My test car has a single, front-mounted electric motor producing 111bhp and 92lb ft.

Energy is supplied by a 44.2kWh lithium-iron-phosphate drive battery with an almost entirely usable capacity of 43.7kWh. That's good for a claimed 198 miles, which compares favourably with the 5's smaller-battery Urban Range model (its 40kWh pack returns 190 miles). My car's charging speed is rated at 100kW, beating both the Inster (73kW) and 5 (80kW).

The ë-C3's on-paper performance is also competitive, if not exactly compelling. It will canter from 0-62mph in 10.4sec, according to the promotional literature, or a full second slower if you ask our road testers (Autocar, 30 April). Still, it's about what you would expect for this kind of car at this kind of price. More importantly, driving the ë-C3 in town – where these Citroëns will typically do most of their business – so far has been an absolute breeze, helped by its 10.6m turning circle.

Its dinky dimensions haven't been noticeable inside, though. A height increase of 107mm compared with the previous generation's combustion-powered C3 is offset somewhat by the underfloor battery but still makes the cabin feel spacious in both rows, especially in terms of head room up front.

At 310 litres, the boot may not be the largest in the supermini class, although it seems to have found favour with my colleagues, who have already loaded it with detritus for trips to the tip and bags and coats for family outings.

SECOND OPINION

I'm quite taken by this car's soft-riding, easy-going personality. I've found that it makes a most agreeable city commuter. But Jack's regular motorway runs home to Hampshire might leave him grappling with its short range and slow charging speeds. **CM**

No doubt my car being specified in the higher of two trim levels, Max, helped matters. Among the niceties are a wireless phone charger, black exterior design features, a winter pack that brings heated front seats, a heated steering wheel and a heated windscreen, and a visibility pack that includes

Even Citroën's cheapest car gets its Progressive Hydraulic Cushions

Interior feels cheap but of the cheerful rather than nasty variety

Advanced Comfort Seats use high-density foam to support your body

Look, man, don't tell me what to do

automatic wipers and automatic LED headlights.

To navigate these features there is a crisply rendered 10.3in infotainment touchscreen, as well as plenty of physical buttons and steering wheel controls. Importantly, there are also a few easy-to-reach buttons to switch off the driver assistance systems.

What will immediately stand out to prospective buyers is the oblong-shaped steering wheel, which I've so far found difficult to grip and awkward to turn in sharper corners. It's paired with a digital dashboard that displays key information such as the speed limit, how fast you're travelling and the remaining range. It's not all that customisable, but it is at least easy to read.

Essentially Citroën's version of the divisive Peugeot i-Cockpit, this C-Zen Lounge is quite aptly named. With plush and supportive seats, and little road noise or electric motor whine intruding into the cabin, it's a calming, comfortable place to be. Whether the sense of tranquillity will be further enhanced by the small motivational messages woven into the armrests, I'm not so sure. 'Be Cool', one says. 'Have Fun', says another.

These reincarnated Love Hearts just seem somewhat frivolous. Unnecessarily so, since the ë-C3 already has proper things to shout about, not least a usable daily range, enough power to satisfy most target buyers and plenty of room inside.

Whether the car can deliver on its promises – can it really make me 'Feel Good and Be Happy'? – is what I will be tracking in the months to come, with an especially close eye on how efficient it proves. Real-world miles per kWh, particularly during extended motorway driving, has been a slight stain on several of this car's rivals, not excluding the 5. Let's see if my own small French EV defies the trend and excels beyond city limits.

JACK WARRICK

TEST DATA

CITROEN E-C3 44KWH MAX

Price new £23,795 **Price as tested** £24,490 **Options** Elixir Red paint with black roof £695 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Range** 198 miles (WLTP) **Economy** 3.6mpkWh (WLTP)

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

jack.warrick@haymarket.com

BMW 1 SERIES

We've firmed up our opinions on this M Sport hatch's ride quality

MILEAGE 4057

WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT To see how much progress BMW has made with its entry hatch between generations

Take one look at my BMW 120, with its prominent spoiler, mock diffuser and big red calipers, and more pertinently its 40-profile rubber stretched thinly around 19in wheels, and you might assume its ride is as stern as a sergeant major.

You wouldn't be entirely wrong, but nor would you be entirely right. Even on the M adaptive suspension fitted as part of the £2075 M Sport Package Pro, which is claimed to "further enhance the vehicle's dynamic potential without compromising comfort", the ride is always firm and often restless. However, it could be worse – as was illustrated when Felix Page and I swapped cars recently.

We both felt that his Cupra Leon Estate, with its even wispier 35-profile tyres on the same-size rims, was firmer and jigglier still. Brighton's spinal road looks like the surface of the moon these days, and I was constantly in fear of a puncture or worse, so loudly and harshly did the Leon's springs slam into each crater. While the 120's ride is also not what either of us would describe as outright comfortable, we had no doubt that it would be more suited to the role of a town car.

LOVE IT

ON THE DOWN-LOW

I recently had to hire a carpet cleaning machine, which was heavy and awkward to lift into the boot. It would have been even tougher in an SUV.

LOATHE IT

OBNOXIOUS FACE

BMW added its Iconic Glow grille to the Technology Plus Pack in January. Thank goodness my car was made last September…

When Autocar road tested a 120 M Sport in December last year, our criticisms of its ride centred on the dampers' grabby nature making the car seem short on wheel travel, and I absolutely recognise that criticism. Even on the motorway, at which speed the ride has generally smoothed out, I can easily tell which bits haven't been resurfaced in a long while.

I should clarify that I actually don't have much of a problem with the way my car rides, because I know it's justified by the 120's dynamic potential, and I'd rather have a car in which I can have good fun than one that bobs and floats unhappily through corners, even if it is at the expense of an occasional wince or grimace.

You may be less zealous, though. And if so, entry-level Sport trim is worth investigating, because having 17in wheels, 55-profile tyres and softer springs would surely be more consequential than losing frequency-selective dampers. The fancy technology can be added back via options packs and, if you really must have the M Sport look, so can the contrasting black roof, tinted rear windows and sports seats.

Do that and not only would your 120 probably be comfier but it would still look pretty sporty, too, and more easily duck under the 'luxury car tax' bar. Food for thought.

KRIS CULMER

TEST DATA

BMW 120 M SPORT

Price new £32,775 **Price as tested** £43,190 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 44.8mpg **Last seen** 4.6.25

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE

kris.culmer@haymarket.com

Leon may be quicker and more athletic than the 120, but it's also a lot less comfy

BENTLEY BENTAYGA

A family holiday in northern France provides an excuse to ride LeShuttle

MILEAGE 17,501
WHY WE'RE RUNNING IT In facelifted form, is this SUV still the pinnacle of British luxury motoring?

The last Bentley I drove on the continent was a Continental in 2019. The glorious metallic grey V12 GT traversed the Loire Valley, stopping at various chateaux while its driver and passenger ate baguettes, fresh strawberries and pains au chocolat.

There surely can't be many cars more fitting for such a sojourn than a Continental GT, even though its shortage of space in the back and small boot can be a drawback. But with its Bentayga SUV sibling, that's not a problem and the added practicality can pay off on a trip to the continent, as I found out.

This trip to France was as much about the journey as the destination, because since my son was very small, I've been excited to take him on LeShuttle. As he's grown, so has his love of vehicles and how they work so going on the 'car train', as we've fondly named it, has been the source of much excitement.

If you're a regular reader, you may know that I am also a fan of LeShuttle, at least in part because I find any engineering at vast scale so impressive, whether it be gargantuan cargo ships or going on a train through a tunnel under the sea. And it gets me to France easily, which as a Francophile is a major perk.

With the boot packed to the brim (couldn't have fitted a quarter of this in a Conti…), we headed to Folkestone. First stop was the services, at which magazines were bought, Kinder eggs were consumed and, happily, because we had time to kill, there was a children's play area with train-themed soft play and other toys.

Having not done this in a while, I'd not factored in a queue for border control, which was bottle-necked because the French had only a couple of booths open… but before I'd even got that far, a very nice policeman lightly interrogated me about my car. Safe to say, I was happy I had the correct documentation from Bentley for taking it abroad.

Regardless, he checked it wasn't on any watch lists. I couldn't help thinking this specification of Bentayga would be the car I'd least

Spot the odd one out, but at least they're all from the same parent company

LOVE IT

SOFT-TOUCH CLOSING DOORS
When you're juggling a lot of luggage and a small child, this feature is a major boon.

LOATHE IT

REVERTING TO 'CUSTOM' MODE
The car starts on 'Custom' mode rather than the mode you had last selected, which is annoying.

Bentayga is 2m wide so it was sensible to book the oversized carriage

likely try to get out the country surreptitiously but then I'm no expert car thief.

On to the train. I'd sensibly booked the oversized carriage and even that was nerve-racking. There's nowhere that a matt orange Bentayga shrinks into the background, but driving it on to a LeShuttle carriage makes one feel particularly conspicuous. Wheels positioned carefully between the carriage's two 'kerbs', we parked up and, in true Bentley style (ahem), we sat on the edge of the walkway and had our packed lunch of crackers and cheese, Hula Hoops, apple and yoghurt.

In a recent report (28 May), I wrote about the car unexpectedly changing its unit of speed measurement. It wasn't welcome then, but now that episode proved useful because it meant I was able to quickly find the correct screen menu to change the car from mph to kph while under the Channel. I also went to the 'Lighting' screen to adjust the headlights for driving on the right, which ensured we met France's legal requirements.

Off the train without a hitch – an experience, I suspect, I'll never tire of – we headed towards Le Crotoy, a sleepy French town about 1hr 15min away. An empty, perfectly surfaced motorway and some empty, perfectly surfaced A- and B-roads took us to our destination and the Bentayga soaked them up effortlessly. I've been testing its various Drive modes over the past couple of months and did the same on French roads, but Comfort remains my preferred daily option.

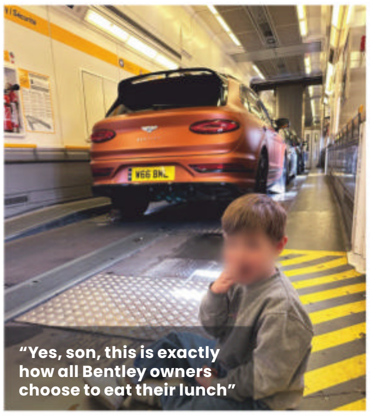
If I'd felt conspicuous in the Bentley on LeShuttle, that was nothing compared with driving through the deserted French conurbation of Le Crotoy. As we approached our little cottage, I wondered if this 2m-wide Bentley would fit through the quaint gate posts, but happily it did so easily.

The simple life of throwing stones on the beach and boulangerie visits didn't ask much of the Bentayga's services, but when we drove to town, it just about managed to fit into a parking space (a universal problem for this car) and we smiled at everyone who seemed curious at the sight of a seemingly rare British person in a rare British car.

The drive home was just as enjoyable and undemanding as the outbound journey. In the queue for LeShuttle, we were sandwiched between multiple VW camper vans all bound for the bigger carriage, but we weren't the only eye-catching car as there was a Lotus club gathering in the lane adjacent, with whom we made friends.

Safe to say, we'll be back on the car train soon enough. Sadly, it won't be in the Bentley but what a way to do your first LeShuttle trip.
RACHEL BURGESS

If you thought the Bentley was big, those two cars are nearly as big as an orca


"Yes, son, this is exactly how all Bentley owners choose to eat their lunch"

Fitting it into a parking space isn't always easy – either in France or the UK

TEST DATA

BENTLEY BENTAYGA V8 S
Price new £197,300 **Price as tested** £258,185 **Faults** None **Expenses** None **Economy** 23.3mpg **Last seen** 4.6.25

SHARE YOUR EXPERIENCE
rachel.burgess@haymarket.com

There is little need to compromise on what you take with a boot like this

SNAPSHOTS

RENAULT SCENIC

Mileage 7655 **Last seen** 11.6.25
Cupholders of a useful size and shape are in short supply in the Scenic, but other useful storage is not. There's a phone tray below the touchscreen that has a wireless charging mat and the slot in the front of the armrest can house a phone, a wallet and the key. The interior remains a real Scenic high point. **MT**

FORD EXPLORER

Mileage 3987 **Last seen** 11.6.25
It can take a few months with an EV to work out how to maximise its efficiency, and as I near the end of my time with the Explorer, I'm definitely getting more out of a charge than when it was first delivered. I'd like to think that's because I've adjusted to its foibles, such as regen and drive mode settings… but it could just be the warmer weather. Also, Steve Cropley borrowed the Explorer for his recent tour of UK Ford locations and promptly got closer to 4mpkWh than I'd ever managed. Maybe I need to practice more. **JA**

MG CYBERSTER

Mileage 3642 **Last seen** 4.6.25
I still feel self-conscious when I'm seen using these electric scissor doors. It's all a bit flamboyant for me. They'd be usefully quicker if they were manually operated too, because they do dawdle, and pause if you're near them. But they are practical because in a tight car park they need less space than a conventional door to be opened wide. **MP**

USED CARS

HOW TO BUY A VOLVO XC60

THE ANTI-AGEING FAMILY SUV

Mk2 XC60 arrived in 2017 but only one thing betrays its age: its used price

In the dog-eat-dog mid-size SUV class, a distinctive exterior design is crucial to stand out from the crowd. Case in point: the second-generation Volvo XC60, which even at eight years old still looks fresh, enticing and just a little bit different.

The minimalist, Nordic-chic aesthetic gives the XC60 the distinct edge for kerb appeal next to the likes of the Audi Q5 and BMW X3 – and now that you can bag this upmarket, tech-rich SUV for as little as £12,000, it starts to look all the more attractive.

The show continues once the doors open too. The XC60's airy cabin is modelled on the flagship XC90's so it is among the slickest, most comfortable and most technologically advanced in its segment. There are plush leathers, soft materials adorn all the key touchpoints and, while there is a big portrait-oriented touchscreen, it's supplemented by a useful array of chunky switches and buttons to satisfy your analogue proclivities.

All trim levels are well equipped. You can spend around £2000-£3000 more on a range-topping Inscription model, which gets 20in wheels and massage seats, but you won't feel short-changed by entry-level Momentum, with its all-important heated steering wheel and 'Thor's hammer' LED headlights. If you're after a more sporting look, then R-Design is your best bet but just be aware of the slightly firmer front seats.

Rear accommodation is good, and although the second row doesn't slide fore and aft, adults will have

It's well appointed, looks stylishly individual and even has actual buttons

What we said then

5 JULY 2017

"The latest XC60 ought to be as close to a home run as Volvo has enjoyed under Geely's ownership – and in several important respects, it pays out on the initial promise. Much like the XC90 and the model it replaces, it likely fits very neatly its buyers' idea of what a modern, premium-badged 4x4 should look, sound and feel like."

no trouble getting comfortable in the back. The boot is slightly short of class standards, at 505 litres, but it's still big enough for several carry-on suitcases and has no lip so is easy to load.

Boot capacity drops to 468 litres if you opt for the 401bhp T8 Twin Engine petrol plug-in hybrid, but it compensates for its reduced cargo capacity with a 27-mile EV range and cheaper tax. It's no slouch, either: its turbocharged and supercharged (yes, we do mean 'and') engine, coupled with an electric motor, allows for a 5.3sec sprint to 60mph.

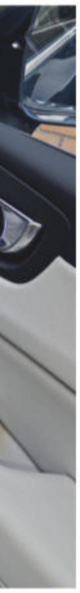
As for the other engines, there's nothing bigger than 2.0 litres and no more than four cylinders. The 187bhp diesel D4 is smooth and will do around 45mpg day to day, but we would opt for the 232bhp D5, which is punchier and no less economical. It's better for towing duties too. There's also the 251bhp T5 petrol, and while it's quick, you'll do well to get more than 30mpg.

In 2019, Volvo rolled out a range of hybridised engines. There's the 247bhp B5P and the sprightly 298bhp B6P. The B5P is widely available and costs around £20,000 for a four-year-old example with about 50k-60k miles on the clock. You'll pay similar money for a younger 197bhp B4D or 232bhp B5D diesel: both are smooth, efficient and pleasant to drive. Volvo also added the T6 Recharge PHEV, which can do an impressive 48 miles on electric power – more than the equivalent X3.

A facelift in 2021 helped the XC60 keep pace with its German competitors, when it gained a new front end, upgraded 12.3in Android-based infotainment system and quieter, more comfortable cabin.

A tidy post-facelifted car with around 50,000 miles under its belt will set you back something like £25,000, about the same as an equivalent Audi Q5 – and, more importantly, half the price of a near-identical, showroom-fresh XC60.

SAM PHILLIPS



Facelifted cars like this one have darker rear lights and lower bumpers

> "Now you can bag this upmarket, tech-rich SUV for £12k, it starts to look all the more attractive"

How to get one in your garage

AN OWNER'S VIEW

ALLAN DRAKE

"I bought my 2019 XC60 at the beginning of last year. I didn't need a car as big as my old Mercedes ML but I still wanted something four-wheel drive. I got a bit of stick from my daughter about it being an 'old man's car' but in my opinion it's one of the best I've owned.

"I'm over six foot and have had issues with leg room in other cars but the Volvo has an excellent driving position. I did a four-hour journey last week and got to the other end without an ache at all."

BUYER BEWARE...

■ ENGINE

Petrol cars can burn oil. Causes vary from faulty piston rings to worn seals and gaskets, or even a damaged head gasket. Check for blue smoke.

Broken pistons, crank seal leaks and faulty direct injection systems are not uncommon with petrol models and are pretty serious issues. Take a long test drive and check for leaks.

Reduced engine performance in a diesel could point to a clogged diesel particulate filter, which is often caused by a busted oxygen sensor.

The T8 PHEV's supercharger seals can fail and hamper performance.

■ BRAKES

Cars built in 2020 were recalled for an autonomous emergency braking fault. Ensure any required remedial work has been done.

■ INFOTAINMENT

Check the touchscreen is not suffering from any latency issues or software gremlins. A blank screen or laggy Google apps could indicate that it needs a software update.

■ ELECTRICS

Electrical issues can knock out various different functions like the electric handbrake, which may turn on by itself. Random radio station changes, collision warnings and false alerts also aren't uncommon, so turn everything on and off and make sure the tech's all up to date.

Early electronic bootlid motors were prone to failure, but there was a recall in 2019.

ALSO WORTH KNOWING

The 409bhp Polestar Engineered PHEV is a rare gem. It has four-wheel drive, manually adjustable

Öhlins dampers and the same suspension configuration as a Polestar 1 – and it will still do 25 miles on a charge.

You can get an XC60 with a six-speed manual gearbox, but we would opt for the more refined and smooth eight-speed auto.

The T8 Twin Engine plug-in hybrid became the T8 Recharge from 2021 and has an electric-only range of up to 47 miles.

Core, Plus and Ultimate trims were added in 2022 and the MHEV diesels were phased out by the end of 2023.

HOW MUCH TO SPEND

£12,000-£18,999

Predominantly high-mileage, early diesels, with a handful of petrol and petrol plug-in hybrid cars also available.

£19,000-£25,999

Mileage, age and spec vary a lot here, but you will easily find an immaculate, well-maintained example and there are plenty of facelifted models to choose from in this price bracket.

£26,000-£32,999

Mild-hybrid petrols and diesels are widely available, as well as the T6 Recharge plug-in hybrid. Momentum and R-Design are the most popular trims.

£33,000-£39,999

B5 petrol MHEV and plug-in hybrid variants in strong supply. Good mix of trims. Dealer cars only.

£40,000 AND ABOVE

Pristine, nearly new cars with barely any miles on the clock.

ONE WE FOUND

VOLVO XC60 D5 INSCRIPTION, 2017, 59,000 MILES, £22,895

An early car but tidy, one owner from new and loaded with decent equipment. It has just been serviced and MOTed too.

My car & I

One careful owner, for 57 eventful years

Duncan Rabagliati bought his Austin-Healey Sprite in 1968 when it was six months old. "A bank clerk was the first owner, but when he was given a company car, he offered it for sale," recalls Duncan, a lawyer and chairman of the Formula Junior Historic Racing Association. "My dad had promised me a car if I passed my Law Society finals and that matched up beautifully – and here I am, still with this car."

To my untrained eyes, Duncan's Sprite looks like an MG Midget but he quickly educates me: "My Sprite is a Mk4 with the 1275cc engine. The Mk2 led to the MG Midget, the Mk3 to the Mk2 Midget and this Mk4 to the Mk3 Midget. The last three cars were basically the same but with different badges."

Having owned it for so many years, Duncan unsurprisingly has some tales to share about his Sprite.

He says: "I met my wife in it and we toured Europe in it. A year to the day after the Russians invaded Czechoslovakia, we were with it in Prague. The security services threatened to confiscate it because they thought the box of spares in the boot might be bibles we intended to distribute! Later, in 1970, we were in the paddock at the Austrian GP, chatting to Jochen

Our cars

Focus boot test: crowded, with a chance of meatballs

BY SAM PHILLIPS

Recently my girlfriend and I moved in together, and while I'm adjusting to life without my games console and being forced to watch reality TV, we are still going strong. But, I hear you ask, what does this have to do with my 2011 Ford Focus?

For the house move itself, I was lucky enough to have an Audi Q7 press car to transport the contents of my previous flat to our new place, but my trusty Ford came in handy when we needed to visit the vast and vibrant halls of Ikea to buy some additional furniture.

We sauntered around throwing all sorts of 'crucial' items like artificial plants, lamp shades, picture frames and much more into our trolley. Once we'd picked up a desk and a rather tall-looking cupboard, I left the checkout feeling a little apprehensive. Would all of this stuff fit in the back of my Focus?

Focus's load-carrying potential proved more than a match for Ikea

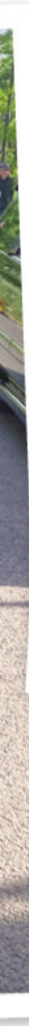
I decided to fold the entire back row flat and tried to squeeze the cupboard and desk between the two front seats, but it was to no avail.

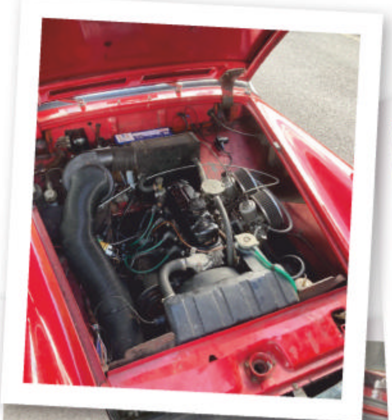
After a bit of thought, I levered the front passenger seat as far forwards as it would go, folded just one half of the rear bench down (so that my girlfriend could sit behind me) and then slid the flatpack desk and cupboard over the top.

With a few adjustments, the mighty Ford swallowed the lot and proved more Ikea-friendly than the Volvo EX40 that a mate had brought along to Ikea (which regular readers may already have figured out…).

Tall wardrobe and desk required some clever spatial gymnastics

Needless to say, I'll be using my 128,000-mile Ford for more load-lugging duties in future.





Its 1275cc A-series engine has done more than 200,000 miles

Duncan has owned it since it was six months old; it looks in fine nick

"I met my wife in it and we toured Europe. Prague's security services threatened to confiscate it"

Rindt. Tragically, he was killed in the next race at Monza."

Given it's been all over mainland Europe and the UK, it's not surprising that the Sprite has done more than 200,000 miles, incredibly on the same engine: "The car was well maintained until Covid. After that, it stayed in the garage but I got it out a few weeks ago and had it MOTed. About 20 years ago, Jaguar specialists Sigma Engineering gave it a thorough refresh. To preserve its originality, I asked them to avoid using replacement parts where possible. However, they did make the engine a little more powerful. Before that, the car's top speed was only 60mph, which meant it took a long time to get to Elba, Montenegro, the Isle of Skye..."

Of course, the Sprite isn't the only car Duncan has owned during his long driving career. He still has the Morgan 4/4 that he bought new in 1979 and toured Brittany in with his wife and three children.

Cars he no longer owns include a rare KC: "It was an early 1950s sports car and, as far as I know, was the only car to be built in Wimbledon. I was at the Rétromobile show in Paris recently and saw an interesting car. I looked at the log book and there was Mr Fitch's name, the man who owned KC. I couldn't believe it!"

By this point, Duncan has forgotten his Sprite and is recalling more of his long-gone motors: "The two most amazing ones that I owned were a Bitter and a De Tomaso Vallelunga 1500. That was a beautiful car. Only 52 Vallelungas were built and mine was the only one in right-hand drive. I also once owned an extremely rare Skoda 1100cc race car that won a motor race in Leningrad in 1959. Another I owned was an Arnott-Climax race car that ran at Le Mans in 1955. Based in London, Arnott was founded by Daphne Arnott, making it, I believe, the only car company to be created and owned by a woman."

We could talk all day but I suspect his faithful Sprite has heard it all before.

JOHN EVANS

Head to head

FELIX PAGE

1990 NISSAN BLUEBIRD 2.0 GSX

VS

MURRAY SCULLION

1997 LAND ROVER DISCOVERY V8

Brief: Find a charming British classic for no more than £5000

FP The whole Spitfire/MGB/Frogeye Sprite thing has been done, so I've thought outside the box. We'd not customarily label the Sunderland-built Bluebird inherently 'charming' or 'classic', but time for a rethink. This £4295 GSX has been doted on since it was built 35 years ago. It's said to even "smell like a new car".

MSc British classics are wonderfully undervalued. There's a glut of pre-war stuff but that doesn't interest me as much as a V8 Landie. This one is cheap – £3595 – because it's a high-mileage LHD bitsa and needs a new exhaust. But there's loads of budget to get that fixed. Plus it's in white with steelies.

FP Let's see how charming it feels when that 200k-mile Rover lump lunches its head gasket. My 'Bird has 'Brit icon' status with Japanese reliability baked in.

MSc If this V8 is good enough for Honda (the Honda Crossroad was a rebadged Discovery), it's good enough for me. That Bluebird is kind of amazing in a 'Festival of the Unexceptional' kind of way. But not in the 'I'd actually want to be seen in it' kind of way.

FP You think that now, but wait until I erect my electric aerial. Ah, technology.

MSc My Disco has been to Oman, Dubai and Greece. I suspect your Bluebird has been to Dobbies.

CAUGHT IN THE CLASSIFIEDS

BMW 330Ci

2002, 36,000 miles, £11,995

This drop-top E46 has modern classic written all over it. Not only does it have a characterful 231bhp six-cylinder engine and manual gearbox, but it's also finished in a super-rare BMW Individual velvet blue metallic. It has a full service history too.

FIAT 124 SPIDER 1.4 MULTIAIR

2016, 56,000 miles, £9375

With an MOT until May 2026 and a recent service, this 124 Spider is ready for plenty of summer road trips. Those tan seats set it apart from other examples in the classifieds and it's loaded with decent kit. It may have only 148bhp but its lightweight design ensures it's fun to drive.

RANGE ROVER EVOQUE HSE DYNAMIC CONVERTIBLE

2017, 68,000 miles, £15,795

Why not channel your inner Barbie (or Ken) with this convertible Evoque? It's fitted with a 178bhp 2.0-litre diesel and it has the same off-road features as its bigger siblings. It's just received a full service.

FORD STREETKA LUXURY

2005, 137,000 miles, £1695

You don't need a fortune to buy a fun little open-top runaround. This Streetka has done big miles but looks tidy enough. It's showing its age inside and the wheels could do with a refresh, but it's otherwise good to go.

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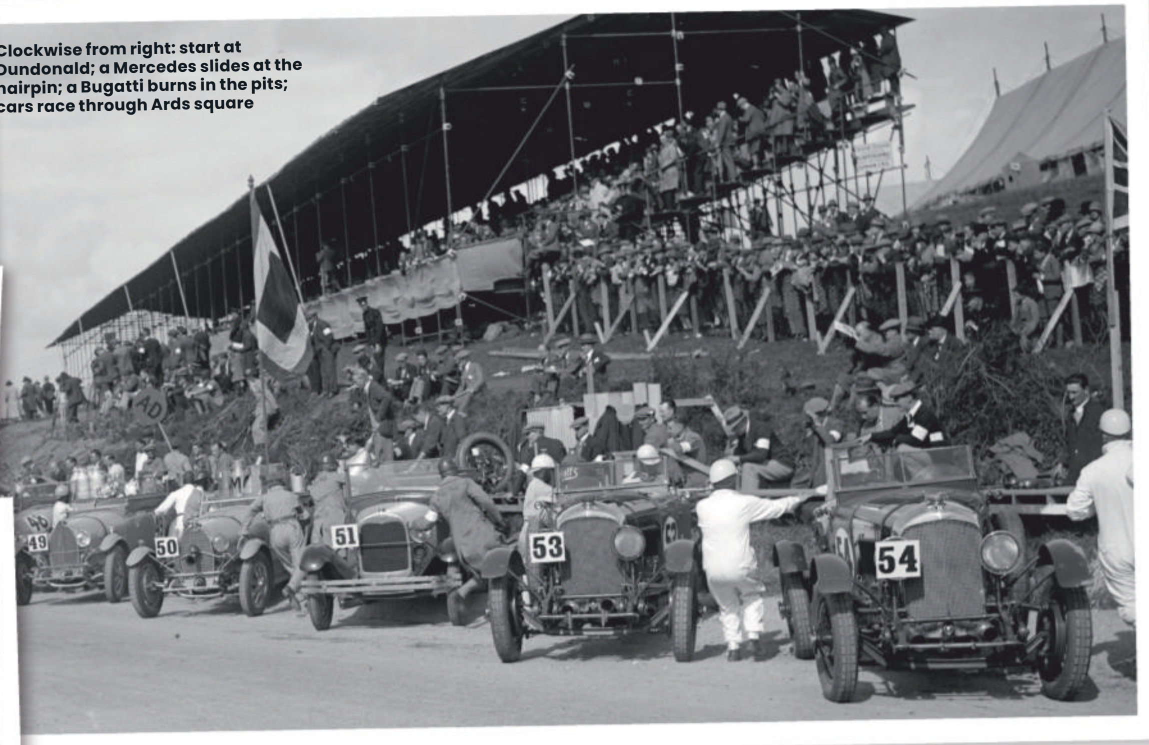

Clockwise from right: start at Dundonald; a Mercedes slides at the hairpin; a Bugatti burns in the pits; cars race through Ards square

When the UK had its own little Le Mans

Every year, motorcycling enthusiasts keenly await the summer for the wild Isle of Man TT races. But how many know that there used to be TT races for cars as well?

In fact, the Tourist Trophy was conceived for cars. From 1905, a race was held on Mann's Highroads Course – twice the length of today's Mountain Course. By 1922, though, this was considered unsuitable for such use, and the event lapsed.

A new venue was finally found six years later in County Down, as championed to the RAC by Harry Ferguson, a successful Northern Irish tractor manufacturer.

This 13.6-mile road course – "as hard, as tricky and as magnificent as any in the world", in the view of Autocar – was a triangle linking the towns of Comber, Dundonald and Newtownards, from which it inherited the nickname of Ards.

The idea was that it was rural enough to feature proper country roads yet easily reachable from Belfast – and indeed, "the night before was full of people coming on foot, in trams, in coaches, and in their private donkey carts to the course; lanterns gleamed fitfully in the darkness; straggling families toiled to their selected spot with little hampers of food and big bottles of the local *wine* to make merry round impromptu bonfires". Many had travelled from the other UK nations aboard ferries.

Forty-four men lined up outside the imposing new pit structure that Saturday, with 30 laps (or 410 miles) ahead of them. As at Le Mans in its early years, they were not race cars but production models. A balance of performance system was in force – and, curiously, half the laps had to be completed with the car's hood up, the other half with it down.

"Out of the turmoil shot Tim Birkin and Humphrey Cook to preserve the Bentley tradition that the team is always first off the mark. After them roared a cloud of cars of all types and sizes, dust welling up in clouds from the new non-slipping compound on the road.

Irishman Don won for English brand Lea-Francis

Serial land speed record breaker Campbell signs autographs for admirers

"The crowd gradually opened out. After two laps [they all] streamed into the pits. Then came the first of many sensations: the tank of Malcolm Campbell's Bugatti leaked over the exhaust; the fuel caught alight; there was a fierce 'woof' of flame and clouds of black smoke. In practically no time, all that was left was a mess of discoloured metal.

"Meantime, great things were happening: the Austin's lead was being reduced by leaps and bounds; the Rileys, Alvis and Lea-Francis were going at each other bald-headed; while behind Lord Curzon's Bugatti, the Austro-Daimlers and Bentleys were faster every lap.

"Wild things were happening on corners: at one place, three cars chased a big machine, the mechanic of which would not look round, and their crews almost cheered when the driver overshot the [tight right-hand] Ards corner. At Comber, where oil had made the road slippery, Clive Gallop's Riley had a great skid, and the Mercedes of Tommy Thistlethwayte used the escape road at Dundonald hairpin.

"At half distance, Gallop led, with the Amilcar of Vernon Balls second, and, extraordinary as it seems, the field had had six changes of leader, which shows how hot was the pace, how varying people's fortunes."

True enough: merely a lap later, Gallop hit a gully, skidded wildly and crashed up a bank. Then a very localised rain shower took out two more of the leaders, before the big Mercedes flipped over (amazingly, the crew righted it and carried on). Only 12 cars would reach the finish.

Amid this chaos, Dublin-born Kaye Don had taken first in a Lea-Francis, pursued by Leon Cushman in an Alvis in a "ding-dong battle".

"Lap by lap Cushman gained, yet dare not risk everything with so low an oil level. And Don drove a great race, crossing the line a victor by 13 seconds – the closest finish ever in a great long-distance road race."

So stupendous was the TT that European stars entered for 1929, and the RAC put down a better anti-skid surface, flattened bad bumps and replaced ditches on the Ards straight with drains. Germany's Rudolf Caracciola would win for Mercedes, followed in 1930 by Italy's Tazio Nuvolari for Alfa Romeo.

It continued until 1936, when Belfast man Jack Chambers crashed terribly, killing eight spectators.

The RAC last awarded the Tourist Trophy in 2019, to the winning crew in the WEC's Silverstone 4 Hours. Fingers crossed for a revival.

KRIS CULMER

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In pre-war years, we concerned ourselves with braking effort, gradient climbing capability and rolling resistance. Later our attention shifted to take in acceleration, top speed, stopping distance and cruising noise level.

Today we use the Horiba MIRA proving ground in the Midlands to take similar performance benchmarks of new cars – and we've recently expanded the test's remit to take in braking stamina over repeated stops and, in the case of electrified cars, DC rapid-charging performance and measured acceleration at both high and low indicated states of battery charge.

Our tests are designed first and foremost to assess the fitness for intended purpose of any given new car – and to do it better and more thoroughly than any other independent test there is.

You can dig deeper into that century of road testing with a subscription to the digital Autocar archive (visit themagazineshop.com/2025ED/ACA).

Matt Saunders, road test editor

STAR RATINGS EXPLAINED

Autocar star ratings aren't like those you may read elsewhere. We don't simply give the best car in any given class five stars, the worst one star and filter the rest in between.

Rather than thinking in entirely relative terms, we rank cars according to more abstract definitions of their performance, functionality and fitness for purpose, so that every particular verdict means something and has a degree of permanence.

We also penalise cars up to a star for what we consider particularly conspicuous and regressive failings concerning active safety systems or missing instrumentation or physical secondary controls.

☆ Hopeless, egregious. In some cases, potentially dangerous.
⯪ Appalling. An emphatic failure.
★ Very poor. Consistently flawed or seriously misconceived.
★⯪ Inadequate. Sub-standard in key areas.
★★ Mediocre. Acceptable at best.
★★⯪ Competent. Mostly average, with very few highlights.
★★★ Respectable. Consistently decent, with some strengths.
★★★⯪ Good. Well rounded and competitive in key areas.
★★★★ Very good. Sets some new class standards and misses few.
★★★★⯪ Excellent. Extends several key class standards.
★★★★★ Exceptional, unsurpassed. All but flawless.

				0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
ABARTH								
500 Esseesse	★★★★☆	25.3.09	Charm on a stick. Raucous and fun.	7.6	6.5	1135	35.8	-
500e Turismo	★★★⯪☆	9.8.23	A stylish and entertaining pint-size EV but pricey and needs refining.	6.9	6.4	1395	-	142
595 Competizione	★★★⯪☆	26.2.14	Great when it's good but tiring when it's bad.	7.5	6.4	1135	39.2	-
ALFA ROMEO								
Giulia Quadrifoglio	★★★★⯪	29.3.17	Everything you would want a fast Alfa Romeo saloon to be. A triumph.	4.5	3.2	1700	35.7	-
Stelvio 2.2D 210 Milano Edizione	★★★⯪☆	3.1.18	Likeable, if short of class's usual refinements.	6.8	7.0	1815	49.7	-
Stelvio Quadrifoglio	★★★⯪☆	9.1.19	A real driver's car, but it stretches SUV-related bounds of acceptability.	4.0	3.3	1931	31.9	-
Stelvio 2.0T 280 Veloce AWD	★★★★☆	28.6.23	Short on premium refinement but meets its discreetly sporty brief well.	5.7	5.3	1784	32.2	-
ALPINE								
A110 Première Edition	★★★★★	16.5.18	Hilarious fun delivered in effusive and accessible fashion.	4.7	3.8	1125	45.6	-
A110 Légende GT	★★★★⯪	9.3.22	The best fast A110 we've seen but not quite the definitive version.	4.8	3.9	1140	40.2	-
A110 R	★★★⯪☆	15.11.23	Hardcore A110 has its lures but probably not enough of them for its price.	4.2	3.5	1094	39.7	-
ARIEL								
Atom 4	★★★★★	9.10.19	Track-slayer is unrivalled for built-in quality and dynamic character.	3.2	2.4	680	39.2	-
ASTON MARTIN								
Vantage	★★★★⯪	18.9.24	Baby Aston grows up to spectacular effect. A machine of stunning breadth and likeability.	3.5	2.6	1745	28.5	-
DBS Superleggera	★★★★★	21.11.18	Effortlessly fast and intoxicating to drive, the big Aston is better than ever.	3.7	2.7	1910	25.6	-
Vanquish	★★★★⯪	26.3.25	Aston's blown V12 lives on in a devastatingly effective super-GT.	3.1	2.3	1951	25.8	-
DBX 707	★★★★☆	30.11.22	A better DBX to drive, but still leaves room for improvement.	3.3	2.8	2278	26.2	-
AUDI								
A1 Sportback 35 TFSI S Line Style Edition	★★★⯪☆	2.10.19	Luxury supermini lacks the polish to justify its high price.	7.9	8.4	1209	57.0	-
S3 Sportback	★★★⯪☆	18.11.20	Audi delivers an effective if somewhat unlovable hot hatch.	4.8	4.2	1552	39.0	-
RS4 Avant	★★★★☆	14.2.18	A hot estate that oozes class but is curiously short on charisma.	4.0	3.5	1790	36.7	-
S5 Launch Edition	★★★★☆	15.1.25	Rounded sports saloon with a characterful V6 and new-found dose of driver appeal.	4.1	3.8	2027	33.7	-
A6 50 TFSIe Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	5.1.22	Hybrid tech boosts saloon's refinement, charm and running credentials.	5.7	5.2	2077	45.4	34
S6 E-tron Avant Launch Edition	★★★⯪☆	16.4.25	Strong technical showing is undermined by price and lack of discernible character.	3.7	2.9	2346	2.8	256
RS6 Avant GT	★★★★☆	5.2.25	Retro visual charm meets unprecedented dynamism in big-hearted estate.	3.2	2.7	2144	26.3	-
A7 Sportback 50 TDI Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	11.7.18	Easy on the eye and to live with but let down by stolid dynamics.	5.8	5.3	1880	53.1	-
A8 L 60 TFSIe Quattro Sport	★★★⯪☆	17.6.20	Technically impressive but not as cosseting as a limo ought to be.	-	-	2330	-	-
E-tron 55 Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.6.19	A rounded, uber-luxurious addition to the premium EV niche.	5.4	4.2	2569	-	218
E-tron S Quattro	★★★⯪☆	2.6.21	A slick, tech-laden luxury operator but no dynamic landmark for EVs.	4.2	3.6	2643	-	-
Q2 1.4 TFSI Sport	★★★⯪☆	9.11.16	Fit for purpose but a less compelling option than it might have been.	8.1	8.2	1316	-	-
SQ2 Quattro S Tronic	★★★★☆	20.3.19	More fun than you might expect from a crossover or an Audi S model.	4.5	4.1	1530	34.5	-
Q4 E-tron 40 Sport	★★★⯪☆	7.7.21	Practical, pleasant and efficient but not a superior premium product.	8.1	7.8	2112	-	-
Q5 TDI Quattro 204PS S Line	★★★⯪☆	14.5.25	Pleasant and competitive but no particular step forward.	6.7	7.1	2072	42.6	-
Q6 E-tron Quattro Edition 1	★★★⯪☆	2.10.24	EV is hard to love, easier to recommend, with good dynamics and strong EV credentials.	5.3	4.3	-	2.8	247
Q7 3.0 TDI Quattro S Line	★★★★☆	12.8.15	Plush, suave and spacious but so-so to drive.	6.2	6.2	2245	-	-
SQ7 4.0 TDI Quattro	★★★★⯪	26.10.16	A class-topping blend of superlative comfort and usable performance.	5.1	4.5	2330	37.9	-
Q8 50 TDI S Line	★★★★☆	26.9.18	Striking and effective SUV-coupé leaves us wanting more.	6.9	6.7	2285	40.1	-
R8 V10 Plus	★★★★☆	30.12.15	Supercar grips and goes even harder but wants for its predecessor's delicacy.	3.1	2.6	1730	-	-
S E-tron GT	★★★★☆	2.4.25	Audi's super-EV holds great appeal in its purest form but isn't at the bleeding edge.	3.1	2.4	2361	2.8	262
BENTLEY								
Bentayga W12	★★★★⯪	18.5.16	Versatile, genteel, luxurious SUV with a silken sporting edge.	4.9	4.4	2440	-	-
Bentayga EWB Mulliner Blackline	★★★★☆	24.4.24	Stretched SUV lacks the Mulsanne limo's charm but is a better luxury car by far.	4.4	3.8	2600	25.6	-
Continental GT Speed	★★★★☆	22.12.21	Remains a wonderful grand tourer but can fall short as an entertainer.	3.4	2.7	2279	22.0	-
Continental GTC V8 S	★★★★⯪	19.4.23	Sporty V8 execution adds vivacity to a car that makes you feel good.	3.6	3.2	2295	29.1	-
Continental GT Speed Hybrid First Edition	★★★★☆	16.4.25	Electrons make fastest GT quicker but not necessarily better.	3.1	2.5	2462	28.0	47
Flying Spur Hybrid Mulliner	★★★★⯪	17.8.22	Mightily convincing PHEV limo more than earns its Bentley wings.	4.4	3.9	2596	30.1	28

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Flying Spur Speed First Edition	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Hulking V8 hybrid powertrain broadens Spur's remit and skyrockets performance.	3.2	2.7	2750	26.7	44

BMW

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
120 M Sport	★★★½☆	31.12.24	Credible and complete junior BMW still lacks distinguishing driver appeal.	7.3	6.8	1489	45.8	-
218i M Sport Gran Coupé	★★★☆☆	8.4.20	Junior Gran Coupé hits some high notes but fails to inspire.	8.8	8.4	1375	58.2	-
220i M Sport Coupé	★★★★☆	1.6.22	A good coupé rather than a great sports car.	7.3	7.3	1546	46.8	-
M2 Coupé Manual	★★★★½	12.7.23	Junior M car takes huge objective leaps but smaller subjective ones.	4.5	3.8	1687	32.1	-
320d M Sport Auto	★★★★★	15.5.19	BMW's one-time default-choice executive saloon hits even greater heights.	6.9	6.8	1639	63.3	-
330d xDrive M Sport Plus Edition Touring	★★★★½	15.1.20	An estate that's powerful, classy and great to drive – but with a price to match.	5.5	5.2	1922	52.6	-
330e M Sport	★★★★½	1.7.20	Slicker and sweeter-handling than the average PHEV. A true 3 Series.	-	-	1740	-	-
M440i xDrive	★★★★☆	6.1.21	A rounded, engaging and potent coupé let down only by its looks.	4.1	3.7	1775	44.0	-
M4 Competition	★★★★½	21.4.21	A very modern M car and a brilliantly versatile and enjoyable one.	3.9	2.9	1800	32.7	-
M4 CS	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Stunning performance and pace comes with costs that aren't so easy to justify.	2.9	2.5	1747	32.4	-
i4 M50	★★★★☆	19.1.22	Fast, refined and with lots of traditional appeal to convert sceptics.	4.1	3.2	2248	-	186
M4 CSL	★★★★☆	16.11.22	A next-level M car, with the more complex temperament to match.	3.6	2.7	1625	31.1	-
M5	★★★½☆	29.1.25	A technical leap, but one born more out of necessity than inspiration.	3.5	2.8	2373	27.3	35
i5 eDrive40 M Sport Pro	★★★½☆	29.11.23	Has dynamic appeal but less convincing than BMW's other EV saloons.	5.4	4.4	2213	-	235
550e xDrive M Sport Pro	★★★★☆	3.4.24	Undeniably capable and a fine plug-in hybrid sports saloon.	4.4	3.5	2232	40.1	47
i7 xDrive60 M Sport	★★★★½	15.2.23	It has taken huge strides as a luxury car – and still drives like a BMW.	4.5	3.4	2758	-	264
840d xDrive	★★★★☆	16.1.19	A likeable big GT, albeit not the most luxurious or rewarding on sale.	5.0	4.6	1901	49.2	-
M8 Competition Convertible	★★★½☆	5.2.20	Has attitude to spare but isn't the complete super-GT.	3.3	2.7	2020	31.6	-
M8 Competition	★★★½☆	3.6.20	Highly capable but doesn't truly satisfy as either a sports car or a GT.	-	-	1960	-	-
X1 xDrive23i M Sport	★★★½☆	25.1.23	A decent family crossover but a poor BMW.	6.4	6.0	1800	45.6	-
X4 M Competition	★★★☆☆	13.11.19	Fast and precise, if short on the big-time charisma that you would expect.	4.0	3.3	2028	29.0	-
X5 xDrive30d M Sport	★★★★☆	2.1.19	Better to drive than the SUV norm but not better across the board.	6.6	6.6	2279	43.1	-
X6 M Competition	★★★☆☆	20.3.24	Unyielding performance focus makes for a fast but compromised SUV.	3.5	3.1	2442	29.3	-
X7 M60i xDrive	★★★★☆	29.3.23	Uncompromising-looking X7 is seriously fast but laudably refined.	4.2	3.7	2600	28.9	-
iX xDrive50 M Sport	★★★★½	2.3.22	Takes the luxury EV to elevated heights, but its design is easy to criticise.	4.4	3.4	2593	-	252
Z4 M40i with Handschalter Pack	★★★★☆	21.8.24	Manual gearbox gives six-year-old roadster new depth.	5.7	5.9	1561	36.9	-

BMW ALPINA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
B3 GT Touring	★★★★½	15.1.25	Last-dance B3 has mighty breadth and will go down as one of the all-time greats.	3.3	2.7	1910	29.4	-
B8 Gran Coupé	★★★★☆	22.9.21	Superbly rounded but lacking some dynamism implied by its looks.	3.5	2.8	2100	-	-

BYD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Atto 3 Design	★★★☆☆	31.5.23	Lack of attention to detail detracts from the impressive battery tech.	7.0	6.2	1787	-	201
Seal Design	★★★½☆	17.1.24	Frustrating software lets down the mostly impressive hardware.	5.8	4.7	2116	-	279

CATERHAM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Seven 160	★★★★☆	20.11.13	Fun entry-level version of B-road toy smacks just a little of compromise.	8.4	8.7	510	44.8	-
Seven 620S	★★★★½	9.3.16	Supplies fun intravenously with a mix of freneticism and road-going usability.	3.8	4.2	650	29.5	-
Seven 420 Cup	★★★★½	31.8.22	Track-day variant serves up sensational driving thrills – for a price.	4.2	3.4	560	35.3	-

CHEVROLET

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corvette 3LT	★★★★☆	22.6.22	Big step up for charismatic, usable and temptingly priced American icon.	3.9	3.2	1679	32.9	-
Corvette Z06 3LZ	★★★★☆	16.8.23	Incredible engine and chassis makeover, but the price has to be right.	3.1	2.4	1670	26.1	-

CITROEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ami Colour	★★½☆☆	11.1.23	Cleverly conceived but hard to recommend, given its limited capabilities.	-	-	471	-	39
ë-C3 Max	★★★½☆	30.4.25	Predictable limitations but also plenty of usability, space and cheer for the money.	10.7	10.3	1479	2.8	-
C3 Aircross Puretech 110 Flair	★★★½☆	7.3.18	Practical small crossover isn't outstanding to drive but is likeable nonetheless.	11.5	10.7	1159	39.5	-
C4 Puretech 130 Shine Plus Auto	★★★☆☆	26.5.21	Has rational and irrational appeal but lacks a fine-tuned execution.	9.5	9.2	1320	56.4	-
ë-C4 X Shine	★★★½☆	3.5.23	EV motoring done differently, with value, but its successes are qualified.	9.7	8.8	1623	-	162
C5 Aircross BlueHDi 180 Flair Plus	★★★½☆	13.2.19	Attractive and interesting, although its style is better than its substance.	9.0	8.5	1540	47.8	-
C5 X Puretech 180 Shine Plus	★★★★☆	28.9.22	Good value and comfy, this is the kind of car that Citroën should be making.	7.8	7.1	1502	47.8	-

CUPRA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Born 204PS 58kWh V3	★★★½☆	6.7.22	As good as the family hatchback EV class gets in places but not as good as it could be.	6.7	6.2	1794	-	220
Born VZ First Edition	★★★★☆	9.10.24	An already fine electric car's driver appeal is lifted but not transformed.	5.4	4.2	1996	3.5	269
Leon Estate 310PS VZ3	★★★★☆	8.9.21	Fiercely quick and dependable but pulls the heartstrings only lightly.	4.9	4.3	1707	40.1	-
Leon 2.0 TSI 245PS VZ2	★★★★☆	27.7.22	Brilliantly rounded hot hatch shines in its simplest spec.	5.9	4.7	1468	43.4	-
Ateca 2.0 TSI 4Drive DSG	★★★½☆	23.1.19	Hot crossover is objectively impressive but lacks true driver reward.	4.9	4.4	1615	36.7	-
Formentor 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2 DSG	★★★★½	3.2.21	Versatile, interesting, rewarding. One of the best fast crossovers yet.	5.1	4.3	1583	36.4	-
Terramar 2.0 TSI 4Drive VZ2	★★★★☆	18.6.25	Hottish cousin of the Volkswagen Tiguan is likeable but a bit too sensible.	5.6	5.1	1737	35.0	-
Tavascan V1	★★★☆☆	5.2.25	Electric SUV is competent but not very compelling or memorable.	6.0	5.0	2129	3.2	246

DACIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Sandero Stepway TCe 90 Prestige	★★★★☆	28.4.21	Cut-price crossover is compromised in surprisingly few areas.	11.9	11.9	1096	54.1	-
Jogger TCe 110 Comfort	★★★★½	20.4.22	Superb versatility, outstanding value and so likeable with it.	11.0	11.0	1267	48.5	-
Duster Hybrid 140 Journey	★★★★½	27.11.24	Notably improved yet barely any pricier.	9.7	8.7	1413	40.2	-
Bigster Hybrid 155 Journey	★★★★☆	11.6.25	Big Duster in name, big Duster in nature.	8.9	7.8	-	47.5	-

DS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Crossback Puretech 155 Prestige	★★★☆☆	10.7.19	No design smash hit. Short on perceived quality and dynamic polish.	8.8	8.3	1205	48.6	-
4 E-Tense 225 Performance Line+	★★★½☆	29.6.22	High price and a list of niggles keep this family hatchback away from the top.	7.4	6.0	1706	44.7	26
7 Crossback Puretech 225 Prestige	★★★½☆	19.9.18	DS's first SUV is a competent but slightly bland addition to the class.	8.6	7.0	1616	44.6	-
7 E-Tense 4x4 360 La Première	★★★½☆	26.4.23	More focused and makes subtle gains, but its powertrain and ride frustrate.	5.7	4.6	1956	36.6	29
9 E-Tense 225 Performance Line Plus	★★★½☆	2.2.22	Posh saloon is alternative and devoted to its luxury remit but no show-stopper.	8.6	7.1	1886	44.7	20

FERRARI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
296 GTB	★★★★★	21.12.22	Stellar modern-era Ferrari supercar has an unrivalled breadth of talent.	2.7	1.9	1648	37.8	15
SF90 Stradale	★★★★☆	3.11.21	Sets the performance benchmark but isn't a track-handling great.	2.5	1.8	1698	24.4	16

FIAT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
500 Twinair Lounge	★★★½☆	24.11.10	Characterful and stylish, but its real-world economy lets it down.	11.7	13.0	1070	42.1	-
500e 42kWh Icon	★★★★☆	26.1.22	More than just an electric city car and a welcome return to form.	8.1	7.7	1365	-	142
600e La Prima	★★★½☆	27.3.24	Electric crossover is decent value and easy to drive but otherwise a bit easy to overlook.	8.8	7.7	1587	-	173

FORD

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Focus 1.5 Ecoboost 182PS ST-Line X	★★★★⯪	20.2.19	Better to drive and look at than before and impressively good value.	8.9	7.8	1417	43.8	-
Focus ST	★★★★☆	11.9.19	Big on character and performance but not quite truly immersive.	6.1	4.9	1433	40.7	-
Puma 1.0T 125PS MHEV Titanium	★★★★⯪	25.3.20	The driver's car the compact crossover class has been crying out for and more besides.	10.0	9.6	1260	50.0	-
Puma Gen-E Select	★★★★☆	4.6.25	Ford finally brings engagement to the small EV class.	7.2	7.2	-	3.4	179
Puma ST	★★★★☆	24.3.21	Well judged, versatile and fun. The jacked-up hot hatch done well.	7.2	6.2	1301	41.5	-
Explorer Extended Range Premium RWD	★★★⯪☆	23.10.24	Electric family crossover is better to drive than rivals, but at a cost.	5.8	4.8	2067	2.9	262
Kuga 2.5 PHEV ST-Line	★★★⯪☆	24.6.20	Good value and potentially frugal, but this SUV has more to give.	-	-	1844	-	-
Mustang Mach-E Extended Range RWD	★★★★☆	23.6.21	Worthy of the name? Perhaps not, but it's still impressive and likeable.	6.8	5.6	2130	-	-
Mustang Mach-E GT AWD	★★★☆☆	27.4.22	Has its moments but lacks the dynamism of a typical fast Ford.	4.2	3.5	2298	-	-
Mustang Dark Horse	★★★⯪☆	20.11.24	Brimming with character but more compromised than many of its forebears.	4.5	3.5	1853	26.1	-
Tourneo Courier 1.0 Ecoboost Titanium	★★★⯪☆	10.7.24	Has some Ford-typical star quality but not enough for the money.	10.8	10.6	1426	47.4	-
Transit Custom L2H1 320 2.0 EcoBlue 150PS Limited	★★★★☆	8.5.24	Likely to remain the default commercial vehicle, despite a high price.	12.1	11.8	1971	38.8	-
Ranger 2.0TD EcoBlue 205PS Wildtrak	★★★★⯪	14.6.23	Pick-up truck is practical, car-like to drive and generally hard to fault.	9.8	9.9	2348	36.6	-

GENESIS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G70 2.2 CRDi Luxury Line	★★★⯪☆	10.11.21	Likeable left-field choice struggles to threaten the establishment.	7.2	6.7	1751	60.4	-
Electrified G80	★★★⯪☆	12.10.22	Electric limo doesn't quite hit the mark like its Kia and Hyundai platform-mates.	4.4	4.0	2349	-	272
GV60 Sport Plus	★★★★☆	24.8.22	Handsome, fast, sophisticated electric crossover is the best Genesis yet.	3.8	3.1	2192	-	220
GV80 3.0D Luxury 5-Seater	★★★⯪☆	15.9.21	Rich, spacious and comfortable but not a world-class luxury SUV yet.	6.7	6.6	2217	45.0	-

GWM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ora Funky Cat 48kWh First Edition	★★⯪☆☆	1.2.23	Electric hatch is decent value and has funky looks but is a mediocre experience overall.	7.7	7.2	1580	-	154

HONDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
E Advance	★★★⯪☆	26.8.20	More than just a pretty face in the EV crowd but its limited range is an issue.	7.9	-	1535	-	110
Jazz 1.5 i-MMD Hybrid EX	★★★⯪☆	7.10.20	Eminently practical, impressively frugal and pretty joyless to drive.	9.6	10.0	1248	57.0	-
Civic Type R GT	★★★★⯪	25.10.17	Hot hatch is a sheer delight for enthusiast drivers and their bank balances.	5.7	7.1	1400	57.0	-
HR-V e:HEV Advance Style	★★★⯪☆	24.11.21	Fine ergonomics and big on superficial charm but leaves us cold.	9.2	9.3	1397	43.2	-
e:Ny1 Advance	★★★☆☆	1.11.23	EV is charming in some ways but has too little substance to justify the price.	8.6	6.9	1756	-	211

HYUNDAI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
i10 1.2 MPi Premium	★★★★☆	15.4.20	Smallest Hyundai regains leadership of the city car class.	12.3	12.9	999	52.5	-
i20 1.0 T-GDi 100 48V SE Connect	★★★⯪☆	24.2.21	Steady gains for a versatile runabout still lacking some personality.	9.7	10.1	1065	63.5	-
i20 N	★★★★⯪	25.8.21	N division's finest car to date. A serious hot hatch with real dynamic polish.	6.1	5.4	1231	50.6	-
i30 Tourer 1.4 T-GDi Premium SE	★★★⯪☆	13.9.17	Competent, servile, inoffensive-looking family estate offers little to like or dislike.	9.5	9.7	1425	48.9	-
i30 N Performance	★★★⯪☆	28.12.17	Hyundai's first hot hatch attempt is fast and full-blooded with rough edges.	6.4	5.6	1478	43.1	-
Ioniq 6 RWD Ultimate	★★★⯪☆	7.6.23	Usable, rangy and innovative EV let down by cabin packaging and ride.	7.2	6.2	2006	-	272
Kona 1.0 120PS Advance	★★★★☆	6.9.23	Hyundai brings some cheer, value and space to the compact crossover class.	10.4	10.3	1352	50.4	-
Tucson 1.6 T-GDi Hybrid Premium	★★★★☆	17.3.21	Tucson shows that Hyundai can do both style and substance.	7.6	6.2	1612	47.7	-
Ioniq 5 N	★★★★★	7.8.24	A little big and heavy, but compelling like no other EV to date.	3.5	2.7	2221	-	224
Santa Fe Hybrid 4WD Premium	★★★★☆	16.10.24	A superb lounge on wheels, but let down by its powertrain.	7.9	7.5	2007	32.9	-
Nexo	★★★⯪☆	12.6.19	Impressive effort that heads in the right direction for hydrogen fuel cell cars.	9.6	9.7	1852	-	-

INEOS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Grenadier 3.0 T Fieldmaster	★★★⯪☆	20.9.23	Unquestionably a serious proposition but maybe lacking in innovation.	8.0	8.1	2682	20.9	-

JAECOO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
7 SHS 2WD Luxury	★★⯪☆☆	9.4.25	Chinese PHEV SUV is efficient and keenly priced but has too many usability flaws.	7.3	6.4	1814	35.0	41

JAGUAR

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
XE 2.0 200PS R-Sport	★★★★⯪	1.7.15	Junior saloon hits the spot, matching the best of its German rivals at their own game.	7.6	6.7	1530	48.7	-
XF Sportbrake 300PS R-Sport AWD	★★★⯪☆	17.4.19	Estate is built on enthusiast values but in need of a wider update.	6.6	6.2	1727	36.8	-
E-Pace D180 AWD SE	★★★⯪☆	11.4.18	Misses the mark for keen drivers but is a desirable SUV nevertheless.	9.9	10.5	1768	49.2	-
I-Pace EV400 S	★★★★⯪	12.9.18	Jaguar's landmark car strikes a heavy blow to Tesla's luxury EV monopoly.	4.5	3.5	2236	-	-
F-Pace SVR	★★★★⯪	24.7.19	Broad-batted and can vividly thrill but hasn't forgotten its SUV roots.	4.1	3.5	2070	29.4	-
F-Pace 400e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★⯪	1.12.21	Facelift hits the mark. Electrification is a mixed but creditable success.	5.1	4.6	2264	-	24
F-Type P575 R AWD Coupé	★★★★☆	29.4.20	The same likeable bruiser behind those prettier features.	-	-	1743	-	-

JEEP

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Avenger Electric Summit	★★★⯪☆	24.1.24	Not perfect but successfully takes Jeep in a fresh direction.	8.3	6.9	1601	-	172
Compass 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★⯪☆	3.10.18	Pricey, pokey, gruff Jeep is a long shot for SUV market success.	11.0	11.5	1540	44.8	-
Compass 4xe S	★★★☆☆	16.2.22	Not without niche appeal but off the pace in too many respects.	6.4	5.7	1872	46.9	22
Renegade 2.0 Multijet II 140 4WD Limited	★★★⯪☆	28.10.15	Charmingly authentic but also pricey and rather rough and ready.	10.8	11.2	1502	52.6	-
Renegade 4xe Trailhawk	★★★☆☆	30.6.21	Electrified Jeep has some charm but is typically rough and ready.	6.7	5.6	1816	39.4	21
Wrangler 2.2 Multijet II Overland	★★★★☆	10.4.19	Off-road icon is now more competent on it.	9.0	9.1	2122	37.6	-

KGM

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Tivoli XLV ELX Auto	★★★☆☆	14.9.16	Practical, well-priced crossover is competent but far from compelling.	12.0	12.6	1469	-	-
Torres 1.5T K40 AWD	★★⯪☆☆	4.6.25	Cheerful enough, although not as cheap or capable as we had hoped.	11.3	12.0	1661	35.0	-

KIA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Picanto 1.0 MPI 2	★★★⯪☆	11.9.24	No great advance for the breed but likeable, capable and still here.	13.4	13.9	985	51.4	-
Ceed 1.6 CRDi 115bhp 2	★★★★☆	29.8.18	Big step up in the family hatchback class is a watershed moment for Kia.	9.9	9.6	1411	70.3	-

TOP 3

BEST SMALL ELECTRIC CARS

1 Renault 5

2 Mini Cooper E

3 MG 4 EV

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

Road tests revisited

1979 DATSUN 240K SKYLINE

UK arm indirectly replaces 280Z sports car with saloon-derived Mk5 Skyline. Engine could be smoother while road behaviour is "good for a heavyweight", so "if you value handling and performance, the Ford Capri should be your choice".

Price £6819
Engine 6 cyls in line, 2393cc, petrol
Power 127bhp at 5600rpm
Torque 132lb ft at 3600rpm
Weight 1438kg
0-60mph 11.0sec
0-90mph 28.3sec
Top speed 112mph
Economy 21.3mpg

1962 FIAT 2300

At a time when Fiat has the most varied range of any European brand, it introduces a new six-cylinder executive saloon with a bigger engine. "It bears the handicap of import duty very well, and any buyer in that price range who wishes for something rather different may well find the 2300 just his cup of cappuccino."

Price £1438
Engine 6 cyls in line, 2279cc, petrol
Power 105bhp at 5300rpm
Torque 123lb ft at 2800rpm
Weight 1424kg
0-60mph 12.3sec
0-90mph 34.6sec
Top speed 101mph
Economy 21.3mpg

READ FULL ROAD TEST FOR FREE*

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Proceed 1.4 T-GDi GT-Line S	★★★⯪☆	27.2.19	Alluring and interesting but not quite as special to drive as it looks.	9.5	8.9	1475	42.6	-
Xceed 1.4 T-GDi First Edition	★★★⯪☆	20.11.19	Looks good and drives well yet lacks some practicality and polish.	9.3	8.7	1452	46.8	-
Soul EV Urban	★★★⯪☆	5.7.23	Not actually that cheap but likeable and complete.	8.0	8.3	1569	-	147
Niro EV 3	★★★★☆	7.9.22	A good family EV made better, despite some missed opportunities.	6.9	5.6	1739	-	246
EV3 81.4kWh GT-Line	★★★★☆	31.12.24	New-era Niro is rationally compelling although it's not a game-changer.	7.2	6.4	1858	2.6	265
Sportage 1.6 HEV 2WD GT-Line S	★★★⯪☆	15.6.22	Bold family SUV catches the eye but won't hold your interest to drive.	7.3	6.4	1658	44.8	-
EV6 77.4kWh RWD GT-Line S	★★★★☆	9.10.24	Not the outstanding EV it once was yet still a likeably bold choice.	7.5	6.3	-	2.9	227
EV6 GT	★★★⯪☆	4.10.23	Lots of pace and usability for the money but not enough driver appeal.	3.6	2.7	2161	-	209
Sorento 1.6 HEV T-GDi AWD 2	★★★⯪☆	20.1.21	Lacks polish, although its abundant utility appeal and value shine through.	8.5	7.9	2006	43.3	-
EV9 GT-Line S	★★★★☆	31.1.24	Style, space, versatility and range for a more reasonable price than rivals.	5.1	4.6	2660	-	220

LAMBORGHINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Huracán Performante	★★★★⯪	11.10.17	Breathtaking track makeover brings it close to greatness.	2.9	2.0	1590	22.4	-
Huracán Evo RWD	★★★★⯪	20.5.20	Finest driver's car Lamborghini makes is also the most attainable.	-	-	1389	-	-
Revuelto	★★★★⯪	4.12.24	New-era V12 Lamborghini is an extraordinary statement of intent.	2.5	1.7	1960	24.1	6
Urus	★★★★☆	3.7.19	Italy's latest 'mostro' has a driving experience to blow your mind.	3.3	2.8	2285	28.5	-

LAND ROVER

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Range Rover Evoque P300e R-Dynamic HSE	★★★★⯪	10.2.21	A better plug-in compact SUV. Expensive but slick and luxurious.	6.8	5.9	2158	32.7	24
Discovery Sport D180 AWD SE	★★★★☆	8.1.20	Off-road fidelity and character outweigh a lacklustre powertrain.	10.3	10.5	2145	47.5	-
Discovery TD6 HSE Luxury	★★★★⯪	12.4.17	A proper Land Rover, modernised, refined and as likeable as ever.	8.7	8.8	2230	-	-
Range Rover Velar D240 HSE	★★★⯪☆	30.8.17	Stylish, advanced and accomplished but in need of a better powertrain.	9.3	9.0	2089	48.2	-
Defender 110 P400 X	★★★★⯪	13.5.20	World-class capability. Brilliant on and off road – at a price.	-	-	2388	-	-
Defender 110 P635 Octa Edition 1	★★★★⯪	30.4.25	Outrageous, unnecessary and totally awe-inspiring.	4.6	3.7	2717	22.1	-
Range Rover Sport D300 Dynamic SE	★★★★⯪	2.11.22	Deeply appealing and deeply accomplished, with a price to match.	7.2	6.6	2511	42.5	-
Range Rover Sport SV Edition One	★★★⯪☆	28.8.24	More capable than most rivals, but others are more compelling.	3.9	5.1	2546	28.9	-
Range Rover D350 HSE	★★★★⯪	13.7.22	A fantastically well-isolated luxury car and fully paid-up capable 4x4.	6.3	6.0	2667	35.9	-
Range Rover P550e Autobiography	★★★★☆	9.4.25	A unique and enthralling character that brings added refinement in PHEV form.	4.9	4.0	2979	26.6	44

LEXUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
LBX FWD Premium Plus Design	★★★⯪☆	29.5.24	Crossover convinces as a small premium car, but only just.	8.4	8.4	1306	45.2	-
NX 350h AWD Premium Plus Pack	★★★★☆	16.3.22	Interesting, refined and efficient, although not as polished as the best.	7.1	6.7	1812	44.7	-
RX 500h F Sport	★★★⯪☆	22.3.23	Classy and luxurious, but that might not be enough for keener drivers.	6.1	5.5	2088	31.7	-
ES 300h Takumi	★★★⯪☆	6.2.19	Boldly styled, economical saloon has a singularly rational but dry character.	8.7	7.6	1742	48.8	-
RC F Ultimate Edition	★★★⯪☆	6.11.24	Bellows in some ways, whispers in others. A little flawed but never dull or boring.	4.7	3.8	1733	30.1	-
LM 350h AWD Takumi	★★★☆☆	7.2.24	MPV is a fascinating luxury-market curio but no threat to the old-school limo.	8.6	8.2	2368	40.5	-

LOTUS

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Emira V6 First Edition	★★★★⯪	2.4.25	The British sports car is alive, well and expensive.	4.4	4.0	1493	29.0	-
Emeya 600 GT	★★★★☆	28.5.25	A good electric saloon and a good Lotus.	4.1	2.8	2478	2.4	218
Eletre R	★★★⯪☆	24.7.24	There's plenty to like about the new Lotus but little sign of the old Lotus.	3.1	2.2	2682	-	216

MASERATI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Ghibli Diesel	★★★⯪☆	12.3.14	Saloon isn't lacking in style but is a little short on substance.	6.5	6.0	2040	40.4	-
Grecale Trofeo	★★★⯪☆	18.10.23	A belting engine but high-priced and not the best-driving Grecale.	3.6	3.2	2097	33.6	-
Levante Diesel	★★★☆☆	30.11.16	A mildly interesting also-ran, with a weak engine and so-so handling.	6.8	6.9	2205	41.5	-
Levante S Granlusso	★★★⯪☆	8.5.19	Better engine improves the class's curate's egg but can't redeem it.	5.1	4.5	2232	23.7	-
Granturismo Trofeo	★★★⯪☆	11.9.24	An appealing grand tourer that lacks some sophistication for the price.	3.6	3.1	-	33.0	-
Granturismo Folgore	★★★⯪☆	26.2.25	Assured and likeable but could only ever be bought with the heart – even sans V8.	2.9	2.3	2358	2.3	183
MC20 Cielo	★★★★☆	16.10.24	Dynamic iconoclast, old-school charmer, occasional GT. A unique supercar.	4.0	2.8	1783	29.6	-

MAZDA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
2 1.5 Skyactiv-G 90PS SE-L Nav	★★★★☆	22.4.15	The go-to option for keen drivers is also a convincing all-rounder.	10.4	11.0	1050	-	-
3 2.0 Skyactiv-X 181PS GT Sport	★★★★☆	6.11.19	Sweet to drive and great to behold, but the Skyactiv-X engine is no knockout.	9.1	9.1	1425	57.0	-
MX-30 145PS GT Sport Tech	★★★⯪☆	10.3.21	Has smart looks and a plush interior, but the first Mazda EV deserved more.	9.1	8.6	1663	-	-
CX-30 2.5 e-Skyactiv G Exclusive-Line	★★★★☆	19.2.25	Alternative powertrain is a credit to this voluble, unconventional compact SUV.	7.6	7.6	1422	45.2	-
CX-5 2.2D 150PS 2WD Sport Nav	★★★★☆	28.6.17	Still moderately left of field but now likeable in greater proportions.	9.4	9.2	1620	53.9	-
CX-60 e-Skyactiv D 3.3 RWD Exclusive-Line	★★★⯪☆	10.5.23	Old-school in all the best ways, but the ride is difficult to overlook.	7.6	7.2	1893	52.3	-
MX-5 1.5 SE-L Nav	★★★★⯪	2.9.15	An outstanding and usable sports car at an outstanding price.	8.4	7.9	1050	-	-

McLAREN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
720S	★★★★★	24.5.17	Sufficiently complete and exciting to dominate rivals and hugely fast.	2.9	2.0	1419	24.2	-

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*For three weeks from publication date

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
750S	★★★★☆	19.6.24	McLaren's mainstay is a bit of a wild child – at times, to its own cost.	2.9	2.0	1412	28.8	-
Artura	★★★★½	19.10.22	Brilliantly packaged, invitingly poised and wise use of electrification.	3.2	2.1	1552	32.9	17
Artura Spider	★★★★½	6.11.24	Artura finds extra form in convertible guise.	3.1	2.2	1618	27.2	17
GT	★★★½☆	27.1.21	Plenty of pace and purity, less GT-typical usability and refinement.	3.3	2.3	1580	34.2	

MERCEDES-AMG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A45 S 4Matic+ Plus	★★★★½	4.3.20	AMG brings its hottest hatch yet to life without harming usability.	4.1	3.3	1661	41.5	-
C63 S E Performance 4Matic+ Night Edition Premium Plus Estate	★★★☆☆	31.7.24	Fascinating engineering feat falls flat as an exciting super-estate.	3.3	2.8	2217	27.1	7.1
GT 63 4Matic+ 4-Door Coupé	★★★★½	13.3.19	AMG defies physics with a four-door GT that handles beautifully.	3.3	2.7	2135	30.1	-
GT 63 S E Performance 4-Door Coupé	★★★½☆	21.6.23	Rocket-ship GT with astonishing powertrain but still lacks driver reward.	2.9	2.5	2339	23.9	6
EQS 53 4Matic+ Night Edition	★★★★☆	8.6.22	Good but doesn't quite live up to its spectacular on-paper potential.	3.6	2.8	2673	-	259
S63 E Performance Night Edition	★★★★☆	2.10.24	Prodigiously quick, confoundingly slick in its handling, but has a coarseness to it.	3.5	2.7	2666	26.1	-
GLE 53 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★½☆	14.10.20	Remarkable dynamic versatility but lacks some driver appeal.	5.4	4.9	2471	29.4	-
SL 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus	★★★½☆	26.7.23	Stonking V8 doesn't quite redeem a car of as many sacrifices as gains.	3.5	2.8	1939	26.2	-
GT 63 4Matic+ Premium Plus Coupé	★★★½☆	14.8.24	Fearsomely quick and truly usable but less lovable than before.	3.1	2.7	1972	30.7	-

MERCEDES-BENZ

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
A200 AMG Line Executive	★★★★☆	24.5.23	Significant progress for a keen-handling and efficient premium hatch.	7.8	7.3	1396	59.3	-
A250e AMG Line Premium	★★★☆☆	5.8.20	Falls some way short of a rounded 'premium' driving experience.	6.7	5.4	1665	57.8	-
B180 Sport	★★★★☆	3.4.19	In an ever-shrinking niche, this compact MPV deserves consideration.	8.4	8.3	1405	51.3	-
CLA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	21.8.19	Nearer the mark to look at but still way wide of it as a driver's car.	6.8	6.1	1555	48.3	-
C300e AMG Line	★★★★½	4.5.22	Long-range hybrid tech gives C-Class an outstanding selling point.	5.8	5.1	2005	49.0	48
E220d AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	3.1.24	An effective blend of convention, comfort, luxury and modernity.	7.2	5.9	1917	65.8	-
E450d Estate Exclusive Premium Plus	★★★★½	19.3.25	Big-hearted diesel has speed, space and opulence. The only car you would ever need.	4.9	4.3	2167	46.1	-
EQE 350+ AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★½☆	4.1.23	Hot on comfort and tech but lacklustre on range, material quality and space.	6.0	5.5	2386	-	262
EQS 450+ Business Class	★★★★☆	7.5.25	Progress has been made, but this limousine still isn't quite the ultimate luxury EV.	5.9	4.9	2608	2.6	248
EQS 450 Business Class SUV	★★★½☆	6.3.24	Ultra-luxurious seven-seater strays confusingly into MPV territory.	5.5	5.2	2899	-	265
S580e L AMG Line Premium Plus Executive	★★★★½	6.4.22	Plug-in S-Class is the best of an otherwise ordinary generation.	5.2	4.2	2530	37.0	45
EQA 250 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★☆☆	17.11.21	Competent but entirely average. For the money, we expect better.	8.4	7.6	2030	-	200
GLB 220d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	16.9.20	Smart looking and practical but its identity feels stretched at times.	7.4	7.1	1810	55.4	-
EQB 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	18.5.22	A versatile premium EV that doesn't easily command its premium.	7.7	6.8	2235	-	-
GLC 300 4Matic AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★½☆	13.9.23	Shines in places but doesn't notably elevate the GLC proposition.	6.5	6.0	1929	41.2	-
GLS 400d 4Matic AMG Line Premium	★★★½☆	12.2.20	Has much to commend it but not enough to be the S-Class of SUVs.	6.5	6.0	2634	38.2	-
G350d AMG Line	★★★★☆	17.7.19	Customary capability, charm and ego, now with 21st-century luxury.	7.5	7.2	2451	31.3	-
G500 AMG Line Premium Plus	★★★★☆	25.9.24	Anachronistic, iconoclastic and expensive but very hard not to love.	5.1	4.5	-	30.7	-
CLE 300e AMG Line Premium Plus Coupé	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Electrification brings traditional Merc strengths to a desirable mid-sized coupé.	6.1	5.5	2122	37.1	49

MG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
3 Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★½☆	12.6.24	Good value and with no serious vices but still lacks a final layer of polish.	6.8	6.2	1311	47.9	-
4 EV Long Range SE	★★★★☆	5.4.23	Good value, useful and fun to drive to boot.	7.1	6.1	1692	-	185
5 SW EV Exclusive	★★★½☆	25.11.20	MG's second EV does cheap motoring much better than the first.	8.0	7.1	1538	-	161
ZS Hybrid+ Trophy	★★★☆☆	22.1.25	Roomier, cleverer and better-equipped than you would expect for the money.	7.6	6.6	1422	41.5	-

MINI

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
John Cooper Works	★★★★☆	14.5.25	A proper hot hatch let down by a stiff ride and an impenetrable user interface.	5.8	4.5	1363	42.0	-
Countryman C Exclusive	★★★½☆	17.4.24	Spacious but sends mixed messages on family-friendly refinement.	8.7	7.7	1618	46.9	-
Aceman SE Exclusive	★★★½☆	8.1.25	Compact SUV has the usual Mini charm but limited extra grown-up appeal.	6.8	5.7	1756	3.1	162

MORGAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Plus Four	★★★½☆	12.8.20	Refreshing and fun in that true Morgan way but lacks a little polish.	5.1	4.3	1013	54.0	-
Plus Six	★★★★☆	10.4.24	The individualist's sports car made better.	4.4	3.3	1188	37.2	-
Super 3	★★★★½	9.11.22	Adds some subtle modernity to the 3 Wheeler's endless giggles.	6.9	5.9	644	43.5	-

NISSAN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Juke 1.0 DIG-T 117 Tekna	★★★½☆	29.1.20	Impressive in some respects but outstanding in few.	11.9	11.8	1256	46.0	-
Qashqai 1.3 DIG-T 158 Tekna	★★★★☆	28.7.21	Ticks the important family car boxes but its powertrain frustrates.	10.0	9.3	1412	44.9	-
Ariya 87kWh Evolve	★★★½☆	26.10.22	Surprisingly traditional and luxurious although not wholly successful.	8.2	6.4	2109	-	-
X-Trail e-Power e-4orce AWD Tekna	★★★★☆	22.2.23	Capable all-rounder that deals effortlessly with everyday life.	6.6	6.0	1947	33.8	-

OMODA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
5 1.6 TGDI Comfort	★★½☆☆	20.11.24	Chinese SUV has some promise as a purely rational buy but feels under-developed.	7.4	6.3	1474	38.2	-

PEUGEOT

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
e-208 Allure Premium	★★★★☆	6.5.20	Stylish, drivable, usable, reasonably priced – and the best small EV	-	-	1455	38.2	-
308 1.2T Puretech 130 GT	★★★★☆	25.5.22	A reminder of the old Peugeot magic. Small, supple and a bit special.	9.5	9.2	1358	55.3	-
408 Hybrid 180 GT e-EAT8	★★★★☆	11.10.23	Novel Peugeot shows an alternative path for the family car.	8.2	7.3	1746	42.1	40
508 BlueHDi 180 S&S GT Auto	★★★★☆	24.10.18	Stylish and likeable but lacking the polish of more premium rivals.	8.8	8.5	1671	52.0	-
508 SW Hybrid 225 S&S Allure e-EAT8	★★★★☆	8.7.20	This is a comfortable car that looks smart and feels classy.	-	-	1720	-	-
508 SW Hybrid4 PSE	★★★★☆	5.5.21	Hits notable handling highs but feels less than sharp elsewhere.	5.7	4.7	1892	44.0	-

TOP 3

BEST HOT HATCHES

1 Toyota GR Yaris

2 Honda Civic Type R

3 Ford Focus ST

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

e-2008 GT Line ★★★½☆ 30.9.20
Cheaper versions impress; pricier ones won't worry class leaders.
9.5 8.9 1638 - -

3008 1.6 BlueHDi 120 GT Line
★★★½☆ 18.1.17
In challenging company, the 3008 promises more than it delivers.
12.0 12.1 1300 53.2 -

e-3008 73kWh Allure ★★★½☆ 4.8.24
Electric family SUV is rich, handsome and refined but no technical tour de force.
8.5 7.1 2132 - 219

5008 Hybrid 136 GT ★★★☆☆ 12.2.25
Concept car style can't save the function-follows-form engineering.
9.9 9.4 1736 44.0 -

POLESTAR

2 BST Edition 270 ★★★½☆ 12.4.23
A creditable attempt at electric car thrills, although not quite fully formed.
4.5 3.4 2161 - 188

3 Long Range Dual Motor Launch Edition ★★★★☆ 12.2.25
Electric SUV is spacious, attractive and enticing to drive - with a few lapses.
4.6 3.8 2610 2.3 235

PORSCHE

718 Boxster ★★★★½ 8.6.16
Better than ever objectively, but at the expense of vital subjective appeal.
5.4 4.3 1395 35.9 -

718 Cayman S ★★★★½ 10.8.16
Still the greatest sports coupé out there, even if it doesn't sound like it.
4.8 3.9 1430 - -

TOP 3

BEST SUVs

1 Range Rover Sport

2 BMW X5

3 Dacia Duster

SCAN THE CODE TO SEE THE TOP 10

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

718 Spyder ★★★★½ 1.4.20
Spyder's flat six rectifies most, if not quite all, of the 718's shortcomings.
4.3 3.5 1350 30.1 -

718 Cayman GT4 RS ★★★★★ 14.9.22
A feast of noise, revs, handling poise and thrills. Incredibly special.
3.9 3.0 1444 27.1 -

911 GT3 PDK ★★★★½ 11.8.21
Less versatile than some past GT3s but still spectacularly good.
3.4 2.7 1430 29.2 -

911 Turbo S ★★★★½ 10.8.22
Has a questionable raison d'être but is engaging and awesomely capable.
2.5 2.0 1640 36.3 -

911 Carrera T ★★★★☆ 30.8.23
Sharper 911 has a likeable simplicity but makes key compromises.
4.9 3.8 1456 39.1 -

911 GT3 RS ★★★★½ 22.11.23
Esoteric even by hardcore 911 standards but simply monumental.
3.2 2.5 1476 26.7 -

911 Dakar ★★★★☆ 10.1.24
Rally-raid-themed throwback charms like no other modern 911.
3.3 2.6 1660 36.0 -

911 S/T ★★★★★ 3.7.24
Porsche's GT division alters its recipe to deliver an all-time great.
3.7 2.6 1408 30.9 -

911 Carrera GTS ★★★★½ 5.3.25
Hybrid tech punts barnstorming Carrera into the supercar sphere.
2.8 2.6 1607 34.3 -

Macan Turbo ★★★★½ 4.6.14
Luxury SUV meets sports car in a compact, well-priced package.
4.7 4.3 2050 30.9 -

Macan Turbo Electric ★★★½☆ 19.2.25
Otherwise appealing EV is undone by chassis tech.
3.0 2.5 - 2.1 219

Cayenne S ★★★★½ 21.2.24
Rebooted Cayenne impresses and the charming V8 is our pick.
5.0 4.3 2256 28.8 -

Cayenne Turbo ★★★★☆ 5.9.18
As impressive as ever but not quite the driver's car it once was.
3.9 3.4 2307 31.5 -

Cayenne Turbo S E-Hybrid
★★★½☆ 27.5.20
Technically impressive but fails to make a convincing case for itself.
- - 2490 - -

Cayenne Turbo GT Coupé
★★★★☆ 20.7.22
Uncompromising rapid SUV is a bit of a monster – but a likeable one.
3.1 2.7 2251 26.1 -

Panamera 4 E-Hybrid ★★★★☆ 22.1.25
Understated plug-in hybrid is a Swiss Army knife super-saloon.
3.8 2.4 2370 30.1 29

Taycan Turbo S ★★★★½ 30.10.24
Porsche deftly keeps its superb EV on the boil.
2.6 1.9 2356 2.7 233

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

RENAULT

Clio TCe 100 Iconic ★★★★½ 27.11.19
Plusher, smoother, more mature. A car of substance as well as style.
11.6 10.9 1138 56.9 -

5 E-Tech Comfort Range Iconic Five ★★★★½ 12.3.25
Accomplished and well priced, the 5 changes the affordable EV game.
7.7 7.2 1461 3.1 166

Megane E-Tech Techno ★★★½☆ 23.11.22
Likeable and eye-catching, but rivals have moved the EV game on.
6.9 5.4 1688 - 198

Captur TCe 130 S-Edition EDC
★★★½☆ 18.3.20
Second-generation Captur should prove popular, but not with this powertrain.
9.4 9.2 1363 53.1 -

Arkana E-Tech Hybrid 145 S-Edition
★★★½☆ 13.10.21
Eminently sensible but unspectacular.
11.0 10.1 1365 58.3 -

Scenic E-Tech Iconic Long Range
★★★★☆ 26.6.24
The Scenic finally conforms but does so with style and substance.
8.1 6.3 1916 - 313

Austral E-Tech Iconic Esprit Alpine
★★★½☆ 19.7.23
Clever hybrid and pleasant cabin but let down by clumsy dynamics.
8.5 6.9 1696 43.5 -

ROLLS-ROYCE

Ghost ★★★★½ 13.1.21
Most technologically advanced Rolls-Royce is an exceptional limo.
4.7 3.8 2490 28.5 -

Phantom ★★★★★ 4.4.18
The world's greatest and finest luxury car is now also the very best.
5.5 4.4 2780 28.4 -

Spectre ★★★★½ 20.12.23
Superbly lavish and intoxicatingly refined, if shy of epoch-making.
4.1 3.1 2935 - 245

Cullinan Black Badge ★★★★☆ 19.2.20
Far more likeable to drive than look at, for those who have a use for it.
4.9 4.2 2739 23.6 -

SEAT

Ibiza 1.0 TSI SE Technology
★★★★½ 19.7.17
Grown-up supermini shows its rivals how it's done – in most respects.
10.0 10.0 1047 55.6 -

Leon eHybrid FR ★★★½☆ 2.12.20
Competent and efficient but verges on being forgettable to drive.
7.2 6.2 1558 46.3 26

Arona 1.0 TSI SE Technology
★★★★☆ 15.11.17
Polished, mature all-rounder has since lost its class-best crown.
10.5 10.7 1149 40.9 -

Ateca 1.5 Eco TSI FR Black Edition DSG
★★★☆☆ 25.10.23
Once-appealing Nissan Qashqai rival now shows some signs of neglect.
8.9 8.0 1396 44.4 -

0-60mph 30-70mph Kerb weight Touring economy Electric range

SKODA

Fabia 1.0 TSI 95PS SE Comfort
★★★★½ 9.2.22
Comfy, spacious and good value, this supermini is Skoda at its best.
9.9 9.7 1117 58.7 -

Scala SE 1.5 TSI 150PS DSG
★★★½☆ 31.7.19
Different from the bigger Octavia but perhaps not by enough.
7.9 7.3 1200 52.9 -

Octavia 2.0 TDI 150PS SE L First Edition Estate DSG ★★★★☆ 2.9.20
Leads the charge to take Skoda upmarket and mostly succeeds.
8.4 8.7 1510 73.0 -

Octavia Estate vRS ★★★★☆ 29.1.25
A fine estate made more engaging rather than a great hot hatch made a bit bigger.
5.9 4.8 - 37.6 -

Superb SE L 2.0 TDI 150PS Estate
★★★★★ 17.7.24
The large, functional estate car modernised in all the right ways.
8.4 8.2 1673 68.7 -

Karoq 2.0 TDI 150PS Scout
★★★½☆ 30.1.19
Practical, comfortable Skoda is short on charm and dynamic polish.
8.9 9.6 1629 47.1 -

Elroq 85 Edition ★★★★½ 19.3.25
Comfortable, efficient, practical and intuitive; a well-rounded, class-topping EV.
6.1 5.0 2085 3.5 246

Enyaq iV 80 Lounge ★★★★☆ 18.8.21
Practical, rangy, well priced. Hits a sweet spot in the EV market.
8.3 7.8 2098 - 262

SMART

#1 Premium ★★★½☆ 8.11.23
Drivability frustrations mar an otherwise agreeable experience.
5.6 4.6 1861 - 229

#3 Premium ★★★½☆ 15.5.24
Makings of an interesting alternative EV but let down by the finer details.
5.7 4.9 1832 - 205

SUBARU

Crosstrek 2.0i e-Boxer Touring
★★★½☆ 28.2.24
Improved manners for junior off-roader are welcome, if not transformative.
10.4 10.4 1620 45.3 -

Outback 2.5i Lineartronic Touring
★★★½☆ 27.9.23
A pretty good answer to a question that only a few people asked.
9.3 8.7 1690 42.8 -

Solterra AWD Touring ★★★☆☆ 15.3.23
A hint of Subaru-typical capability doesn't take this EV quite far enough.
6.7 6.2 2051 - 169

SUZUKI

Across 2.5 PHEV E-Four CVT
★★★★½ 7.4.21
Excellent hybrid powertrain makes it one of the best PHEVs around.
6.4 5.8 1966 44.4 48

TESLA

Model 3 Standard Range Plus
★★★★☆ 4.9.19
Wrinkles aside, it offers great electric performance and usability at this price.
5.8 4.7 1633 - 156

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Model 3 Long Range	★★★★☆	14.2.24	Packs a real punch. Both updated Model 3s are fine propositions.	4.4	3.4	1846	-	277
Model Y Long Range AWD	★★★★☆	23.3.22	A far better electric car than a premium SUV.	4.7	3.6	1978	-	234
Model S P90D	★★★★½	20.4.16	Great EV, intriguing driver's car. Not quite the perfect luxury GT.	3.5	3.0	2220	-	214
Model S Plaid	★★★½☆	2.8.23	Astonishing pace but not a fully rounded performance saloon.	2.4	1.7	2220	-	301
Model X 90D	★★★★☆	15.2.17	High-rise EV strains under SUV brief but still feels like a history maker.	5.2	4.2	2508	-	147

TOYOTA

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Aygo X Limited Edition	★★★½☆	11.5.22	A mostly very grown-up small car but also an expensive one.	15.6	16.5	974	58.7	-
Yaris 1.5 Hybrid Design	★★★★☆	23.9.20	Grows not only in stature but also in ability and subjective appeal.	9.2	8.8	1140	65.0	-
GR Yaris Circuit Pack	★★★★★	3.3.21	Toyota, on a roll with driver's cars, provides yet another winner.	5.2	5.0	1283	39.2	-
Corolla 2.0 Hybrid Design Touring Sports	★★★★☆	5.6.19	A big step up for Toyota in a vital sector and a better hybrid to boot.	8.5	7.7	1537	52.6	-
Prius Plug-in Design	★★★★☆	23.4.25	Better late than never for best Prius to date.	6.6	5.6	1542	56.1	46
bZ4X AWD Vision	★★★½☆	18.1.23	A decent effort all round but not exceptional in any way.	6.4	5.9	2023	-	208
Land Cruiser 2.8 D-4D 204 Invincible	★★★★☆	21.5.25	Remains supremely tough but now has added kerb appeal and drivability.	10.3	10.3	2503	30.7	-
Mirai Design Premium	★★★★☆	16.6.21	Impressive hydrogen fuel cell car has made strides but remains hamstrung overall.	8.7	8.3	1937	-	-
GR Supra Pro	★★★★☆	14.8.19	Fast, usable and has plenty going for it but leaves us wanting more.	4.4	3.6	1495	39.0	-
Hilux 2.8 D-4D GR Sport	★★★½☆	1.3.23	Gazoo-branded Ford Ranger Raptor rival is formidable but lacks fun factor.	10.0	9.5	2241	32.5	-

VAUXHALL

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Corsa 1.2 Turbo 100PS Ultimate Nav Auto	★★★½☆	22.1.20	Supermini is improved in many ways but lacks the appeal to match its price.	11.2	11.5	1171	51.8	-
Astra 1.2 Turbo 130PS GS Line	★★★½☆	5.10.22	Family hatchback's gentle push upmarket is only a qualified success.	9.9	9.2	1304	55.3	-
Crossland X 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite	★★★☆☆	7.6.17	Typically practical and well priced, but Vauxhall can do better.	9.8	10.3	1278	54.2	-
Mokka 1.2 Turbo 130PS Elite Nav Premium Auto	★★★½☆	12.5.21	The driving experience sells a brave design effort just a little short.	9.3	9.1	1238	48.6	-
Grandland X Hybrid4 Ultimate Nav	★★★☆☆	22.4.20	Inspires big expectations and delivers few, but it's an interesting fleet option.	-	-	1800	-	-
Combo Life 1.5 Turbo D 100PS Energy	★★★½☆	27.12.18	Usable, spacious and practical, if not very pretty to look at.	14.7	16.2	1552	60.1	-

VOLKSWAGEN

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
Polo 1.0 TSI 95PS SE	★★★★½	31.1.18	Brings 'big car' space, class, kit and finish to this class like never before.	10.7	11.2	1145	57.1	-
Polo 2.0 TSI GTI+	★★★★☆	1.8.18	A usable, quick and vastly competent effort but not the most thrilling.	6.7	5.9	1342	46.8	-
Golf 1.5 eTSI 150PS Style DSG	★★★★½	22.7.20	Additional strengths and familiar ones carry it back to the class lead.	8.3	7.8	1330	60.0	-
Golf 1.5 TSI eHybrid Style	★★★★½	23.10.24	New plug-in Golf takes the PHEV hatchback's status to greater heights.	7.2	6.1	1619	46.5	-
Golf GTI	★★★½☆	25.9.24	'Mk8.5' version of hot hatchback is slick and effective but not a big enough step forward.	5.3	4.4	-	47.2	-
Golf R	★★★★☆	14.4.21	Most entertaining distillation of the Golf R formula yet – for a price.	4.4	3.7	1520	43.9	-
ID 3 Pro Performance Life	★★★★☆	31.3.21	Bland but with the substance to further the zero-emissions push.	7.0	6.5	1757	-	145
Arteon 2.0 BiTDI 240PS 4Motion R-Line	★★★½☆	27.9.17	Considered approach produces an executive flagship short on sparkle.	6.5	6.2	1866	55.6	-
Arteon eHybrid Elegance Shooting Brake	★★★½☆	9.6.21	Striking PHEV appears radical but upholds Volkswagen's traditions at heart.	7.1	6.0	1783	52.5	-
ID 7 Pro Match	★★★★½	13.3.24	Volkswagen finds some electric form in an unexpected format.	6.1	5.1	2162	-	239
T-Roc 2.0 TSI 190PS 4Motion SEL DSG	★★★★½	24.1.18	Shows performance verve, dynamic completeness and stylish swagger.	6.7	6.5	1534	37.5	-
T-Roc 1.5 TSI Evo R-Line Cabriolet DSG	★★½☆☆	10.6.20	It brings little worth having to the compact cabriolet niche.	-	-	1540	-	-
Tiguan 1.5 eTSI 150PS R-Line	★★★½☆	22.5.24	Functional and mature, but this isn't the engine or trim we would go for.	9.4	9.2	1606	44.9	-
ID 4 GTX Max	★★★½☆	27.10.21	GTX adds flavour to ID 4 but doesn't reimagine 'GTI' for the EV age.	6.2	5.6	2220	-	200
Touareg 3.0 TDI 4Motion R-Line Tech	★★★½☆	8.8.18	An inoffensive if forgettable bid at a luxury market breakthrough.	7.2	6.6	2292	41.6	-
Touareg 3.0 TSI eHybrid 4Motion Elegance	★★★½☆	5.6.24	It's versatile and likeably unpretentious but won't be a default company car choice.	6.2	5.7	2446	34.1	26
Touran 2.0 TDI 150PS SE Family DSG	★★★★☆	3.2.16	A spacious, refined and classy all-rounder – albeit a slightly bland one.	9.9	9.7	1666	-	-
Multivan 1.4 eHybrid Style	★★★★☆	8.3.23	Latest Volkswagen 'bus combines the best bits of both car and van.	8.4	7.1	2243	37.9	14
ID Buzz 77kWh Style Pro	★★★★☆	8.2.23	It costs plenty but offers versatility and luxury accomplishments.	9.5	9.1	2498	-	185
Grand California 600	★★★½☆	2.1.20	Grandest California is classy but not half as clever as its smaller namesake.	15.8	16.7	3095	28.5	-
Transporter Sportline Black Edition Kombi SWB	★★★☆☆	30.3.22	Not compromised but hardly enhanced by its sporting agenda.	9.1	9.0	2108	39.1	-
Passat eHybrid 204PS Elegance	★★★★☆	13.11.24	Rounded and with good PHEV credentials, but less compelling than its sibling car.	7.2	6.4	1836	44.5	73

VOLVO

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
EX30 Single Motor Extended Range Plus	★★★☆☆	1.5.24	Not enough key strengths – and not enough Volvo pragmatism.	5.7	5.1	1779	-	179
C40 Recharge Twin Ultimate	★★★½☆	13.4.22	A transitional model for Volvo that doesn't go quite far enough.	4.4	3.6	2172	-	194
XC40 D4 AWD First Edition	★★★★½	7.2.18	Wieldy, classy and simple. As good as its bigger siblings, if not better.	8.5	8.5	1735	43.8	-
XC60 D4 AWD R-Design	★★★½☆	5.7.17	The right product at the right time but lacking the right dynamic finish.	8.9	8.9	1836	48.9	-
XC90 D5 AWD Momentum	★★★★☆	17.6.15	A very impressive all-rounder with its own distinctive appeal.	8.3	8.3	2076	-	-
V60 D4 Momentum Pro Auto	★★★★☆	27.6.18	Fine-looking, capable and practical estate with only a few demerits.	8.9	8.3	1669	43.1	-
V60 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	21.9.22	Strong hybrid system gives ageing Volvo a lot of fresh appeal.	4.9	4.3	2036	38.0	51
V90 T6 Recharge AWD R-Design	★★★★½	11.11.20	Hardly revolutionary but exceptionally appealing nonetheless.	5.6	4.9	2109	41.9	-

XPENG

Model	Rating	Date	Verdict	0-60mph	30-70mph	Kerb weight	Touring economy	Electric range
G6 RWD Standard Range	★★★½☆	26.2.25	Chinese electric SUV lacks inspiration but has plenty of rational appeal.	6.8	6.2	2067	3.3	208

WHAT'S COMING WHEN

Kia EV4 September
EV4 takes the place of the Ceed hatchback and will be the first electric Kia built in Europe.

Alpine A390 Spring 2026
Porsche Macan Electric rival has 464bhp and a rigid focus on driver engagement.

Suzuki eVitara September
Mid-size electric SUV with up to 172bhp and a 250-mile range for around £30,000.

SCAN THE CODE FOR THE FULL LIST

Why I love...
LIFTED ESTATE CARS

BY ALEX WOLSTENHOLME

I can't quite believe it: there are now no lifted estate cars on sale in the UK.

With confirmation that the new Subaru Outback won't be coming here, they're all gone. What ever happened to the Seat Leon X-Perience, Vauxhall Insignia Country Tourer and Toyota Corolla Trek? Then there was the Skoda Octavia and Superb Scout duo, Mercedes' All-Terrains, Volkswagen's Alltracks, Volvo's Cross Countrys and Audi's Allroads.

What could be better for tackling the treacherous M2 than an A4 Allroad?

If they're seemingly so unpopular, why do I love them?

First, a history lesson – and it starts with, of all people, the Americans. A nation of households owning multiple land yachts creating a new segment for practical compact cars. Enter, in 1979, the AMC Eagle Wagon, with raised suspension and full-time four-wheel drive. It was another original idea from an ingenious company fighting 'the big three' on a shoestring. The Eagle struck a chord with buyers in rural and snow-prone areas – before being killed by Chrysler's purchase and eventual shuttering of AMC.

Spiritual successors followed in the form of the 1994 Subaru Legacy Outback (the model that really kick-started the trend), the 1997 Volvo V70 XC and 1999's A6-based Audi Allroad.

Soon everybody was at it: Peugeot had the 508 RXH, Saab the 9-3 X and Alfa Romeo the 156 Crosswagon, to name a few more.

To me, such cars present themselves as the perfect all-rounders. That is to say, slightly more versatile estates. They combine the benefits of better handling, fuel consumption and styling with the all-terrain ability of an SUV. In fact, most of them could probably outperform the average school-run SUV on the rough stuff.

Even Volvo won't sell you something like this now. How sad

> **"What ever happened to the Seat Leon X-Perience?"**

And yet despite the number on offer, they were never actually that popular. I suppose that sensible estate car customers don't need four-wheel-drive capabilities (let's be honest, with modern tyres, pretty much no one does) and SUV buyers like theirs purely because they enjoy sitting higher up than other road users.

As a result, they're now all gone in this country (bar a few more months of the front-wheel-drive Ford Focus Active Estate), and even in Europe Mercedes and Audi are the only ones still pursuing the idea.

I'm an owner of a low-slung estate who has no real need for four-wheel drive, but on the apocalyptic roads of rural-ish Kent, I regularly find myself wishing for additional suspension travel and a chunk more tyre wall.

It turns out that in today's Britain, the perfect all-rounder is not a BMW 3 Series Touring but an Audi A4 Allroad (with a diesel V6, obviously). I'm off to Autotrader, then, while praying that Audi will bring the next A6 Allroad here.

What we did this week

YOU LIL RIPPER

It's not every day you get the chance to do an Australian road trip, so my partner and I decided to make it extra special by renting a Mazda MX-5 for a long weekend on the Great Ocean Road south of Melbourne. Save for the not-so-fun automatic gearbox, a few worrying rattles and some well-worn bodywork, this 1.5-litre 2016 soft-top was ideal for koala spotting.

JACK WARRICK

SNACK ATTACK

If you're wondering what lunch looks like on an Autocar shoot, imagine a dentist-defying selection of McVitie's biscuits, Wagon Wheels, Jaffa Cakes and Pringles, and perhaps the odd sandwich thrown in for good measure. Oh, and there's plenty of water – but most of us go for the Coca-Cola instead.

JONATHAN BRYCE

FLAT MATES

Flat tyres seem to hunt in packs. Only last week did I give Matt Prior a lift home because his test car had picked up a puncture on a shoot. Then it was my turn with the Audi RS3 that I was road testing. Fortunately, I had already done the performance testing, because that would have been a no-go following the 'repair' with the can of hope.

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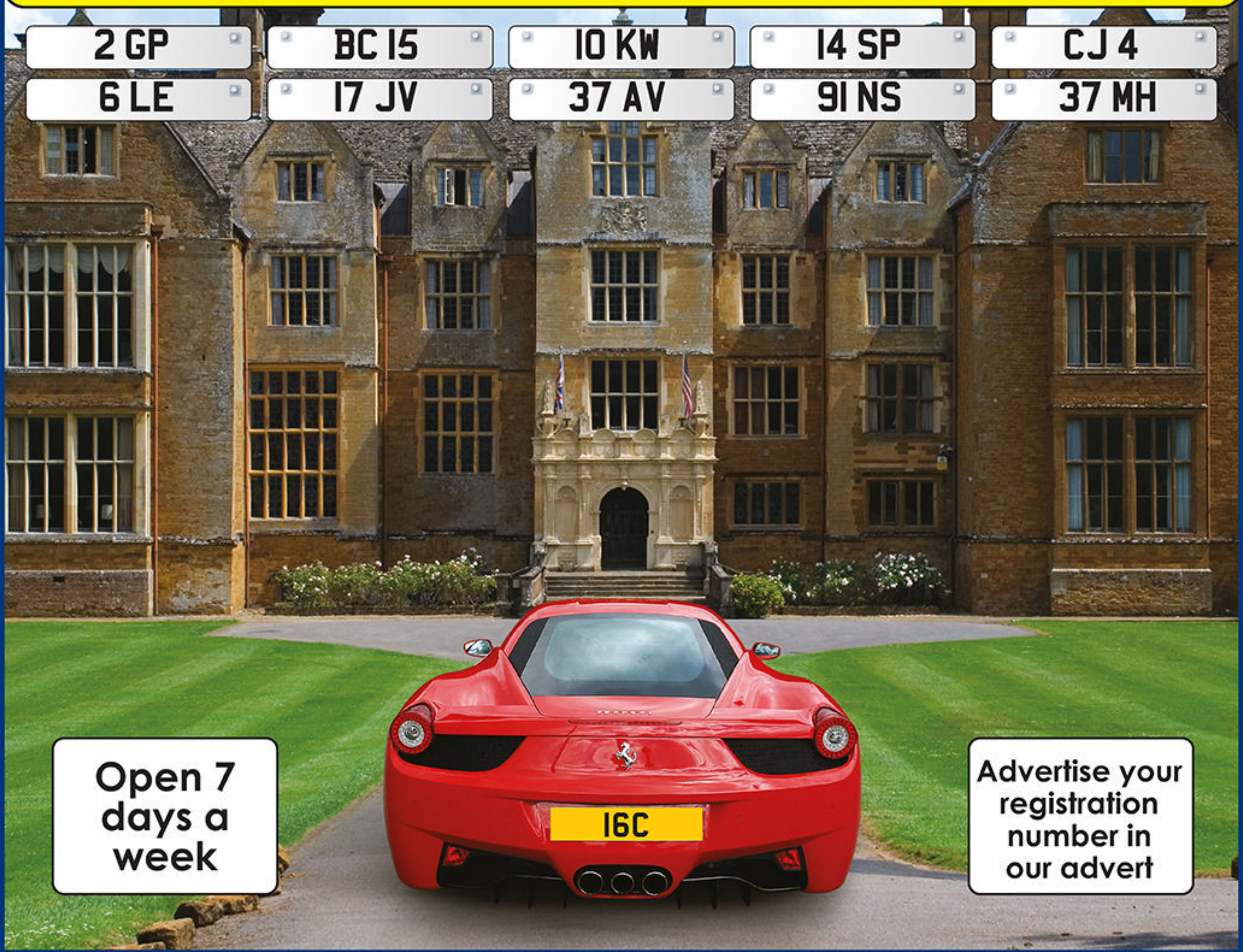
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